



THE INDEPENDENT

ON SATURDAY

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Ffion and her lovesick barnacle

It worked out just fine. William Jefferson Hague did take Ffion Llywelyn Jenkins to be his lawful First Lady of Opposition yesterday at 2pm in the chapel of St Mary Undercroft in the Palace of Westminster. Confronted with the taxing enquiry, "Yr wyf i, William Hague, yn dy gymryd di, Ffion, yn wrwg i ni?" he tactfully replied, "Gwnaf", or "I do".

The bride was Welsh. The service was in English and Welsh. The food at the £13,000 reception in the Speaker's House was Welsh smoked salmon and Welsh saddle of lamb, with perhaps surprisingly,

BY JOHN WALSH

no leeks. The wine was thankfully not Welsh (Sancerre and a rather déclassé Rioja), but some of the prayers and hymns were, along with a Vaughan Williams psalm.

To the small crowd outside St Stephen's Gate, it seemed a very foreign ritual. Press photographers wobbled on ladders while TV cameramen ate cornd beef sandwiches. "Why are they getting married in the middle of winter at his place of work?" demanded an American lady. "That's not very romantic."

Tourists and local office workers made up the bulk of passers-by. Guests arriving by taxi hurried past the press. Leon Brittan posed grandly with friends, as the snappers tried out their motor-drives. After queuing for half an hour, the Swedes had still no clue what was going on. "Who is coming here, please?" one finally said. Why, the head of the Conservative and

Unionist Party of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, I said, who is shortly to marry his sweetheart, FF. "Do you know?", asked the nearest Swede dismissively, "if there's a good bar near here?"

Then, at 3.08, the couple appeared, walking with becoming stateliness down the ancient stairway. Then you realised the reason for their slow progress was the tightness of the bride's dress. It clung to her like a lovesick barnacle. It was a dream of ivory silk crepe, scalloped at the neck, cinched at the waist, fishtailed at the bottom and cloaked at the shoulder. The former Ms Jenkins, hitherto a vividly pretty researcher in civil service threads, was suddenly a businesslike goddess, holding a bouquet of lilies like an arsenal of Indian clubs.

Mr Hague sported a dashing waistcoat, a shining dome and a huge smile, as well he might. His minder, Alan Duncan, directed the press photographers to take the couple's best side. The snappers in turn directed Mr Hague: "How about a kiss?" He happily complied, several times. Mr Hague may not be a screen god, but he is an enthusiastic smoocher. The fourth time he clamped his lips on Ffion's, he seized her right arm and tensed it in an unmistakably erectile gesture. The cameras went into a frenzy. Better-placed tourists had cameras thrust into their hands by the view-obscured to immortalise the moment.

A final wave. They turned to go back in, and we gazed at the line of tiny buttons that marched down the spine of Ffion's dress. It was a wonderful retreating view. Into a few dozen male heads popped the image of Marilyn Monroe's dress in *Some Like It Hot*. It seemed appropriate: Egghead Weds Hourglass (Mark II).



Wedding bliss: Mr and Mrs William Hague at the Palace of Westminster yesterday

Photographs: John Voss

Dame Shirley: a disgraced liar

The Shirley Porter is castigated as a liar yesterday by a panel of High Court judges. They held a decision by an alderman who had accused of "disgraceful and improper" rymandering while leader of Westminster City Council. Ian Burrell claims that she and her party must now pay council £27,023,376.

Heirs to the Tesco fortune not in court to hear Lord Justice Rose deliver a judgment which confirmed the auditor's claim that she was guilty of full misconduct in the Home for Votes affair. The judge said Dame

Shirley and her former deputy, David Weeks, had "lied to us, as they had done to the auditor, because they had the ulterior purpose of altering the electorate" by selling council homes in marginal wards to people likely to vote Tory.

District auditor John Magill had ruled in his final report last year that Dame Shirley, with two fellow councillors and two Westminster council officers, were liable to a surcharge of £31m in revenue lost to the council because of the policy.

The judges ruled yesterday that Dame Shirley and Mr Weeks were guilty of wilful misconduct but they revised the surcharge to just over £27m. The pair are also liable for costs estimated at £2m.

But the money may never be recovered. Dame Shirley now lives in Israel and nearly all her assets are overseas. Local gov-

ernment minister Hilary Armstrong admitted it was largely a matter for Dame Shirley and appealed to her "moral decency" to recompense the taxpayers of Westminster.

Karen Buck, Labour MP and former Westminster councillor, urged ministers to issue a statement on the "massive wrongdoing" of Dame Shirley and Mr Weeks. But the Conservative Party would not condemn her and pointed out that there might be an appeal.

During the hearing Anthony Scrivenor QC, for Dame Shirley, accused Mr Magill of acting as "investigator, judge, prosecutor and his own expert witness" in an unfair investigation which breached the European Convention on Human Rights. But Lord Justice Rose, sitting with Mr Justice Latham and Mr Justice Keene, said the Home for Votes policy, which

operated between 1987 and 1989, was clearly unlawful. "It is, in our judgment, impossible for Dame Shirley Porter to contend that she believed at any stage that targeting marginal wards for electoral advantage was legally permissible."

The judge said Dame Shirley and Mr Weeks had lied to the court in suggesting the policy had been dropped following legal advice.

But Peter Hartley, former housing committee chairman, Bill Phillips, former managing director, and Graham England, Westminster's former housing director, all succeeded in their appeals against the surcharge. Mr Hartley was found guilty of misconduct but there was insufficient evidence to show it was wilful.

After the judgment, a statement from Dame Shirley was read outside the court. "I am delighted the officers and Mr Hartley have been cleared of any wrongdoing. I am therefore surprised by today's judgment regarding myself and David Weeks. We have already been advised in light of the decision regarding the others that we have strong grounds for appeal."

Mr Magill, who carried out a seven-year investigation at what the judges described as the "vast" cost of £3m, was in court for the judgment, which he described as "a terrific decision".

The investigation began after a complaint by a Westminster GP, Richard Stone, who

said: "Three High Court judges have confirmed what I wrote in February 1988 when I told the district auditor that [the policy] was financially and morally wrong." The successful appellants were deeply relieved. Mr England said: "It's been 10 years since it started. The implications were frightening - complete bankruptcy and ruin. I'll sleep well tonight. I didn't last night." Mr Hartley said: "I feel elated, delighted that years of worry and stress have been lifted from my shoulders. I hope no one has to go through this procedure again, which I think is totally inappropriate."

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CROSSWORD Crosswords Time Off,
pages 14 & 28

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IN TODAY'S PAPER

Great red wines for the holiday MAGAZINE



A Christmas story by Sarah Dunant
PAGE 17

Chris Evans: absolutely no stories about him at all ANYWHERE



Aaronovitch on virtual boyfriends

19/COMMENT

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TODAY'S NEWS

Last' Diana interview

Royal aides expressed concern over the distress caused to the family of Diana, Princess of Wales by a controversial interview in the French magazine *Paris Match*, which is alleged to be her last. Diana is said to have spoken about her "profound" feelings for her friend, Dodi Fayed. Dodi is quoted as having talked of marriage. Page 3

Flying Squad raided

Anti-corruption detectives have raided offices used by the Flying Squad after allegations of corruption by a Metropolitan Police officer charged with drug dealing. Members of the Flying Squad are accused of drug dealing, robbery and destroying evidence in return for bribes. It could be one of the biggest police scandals in decades. Page 6

Ghost of Cambridge past

A spectre is stalking the cloisters of Peterhouse College, Cambridge, and witnesses swear they have not been at the pre-Christmas port. Speculation about the ghost's identity has reached fever pitch at the college, Cambridge's oldest and most fiercely traditional. There may now have to be an exorcism. Page 3

مكتبة من الأصل

2/BRIEFING

COLUMN ONE

Our boys may not be all they seem in the great train conspiracy

Hundreds of travellers using the Channel Tunnel will have found their journeys disrupted last night, as trains filled up with soldiers returning from Germany. They were bringing home the boys for Christmas, according to the authorities: but that was just the official explanation.

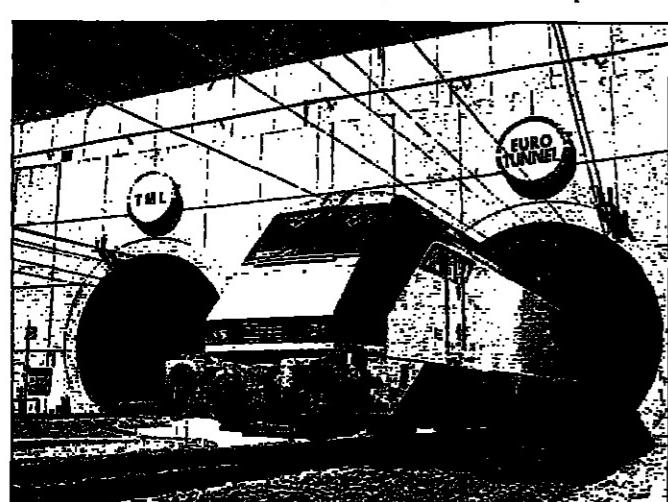
Eurotunnel, which operates the tunnel and Le Shuttle trains, called on 500 passengers to postpone Christmas shopping sprees to France, freeing space for soldiers returning from bases in Germany.

The group also laid an extra 25 per cent more trains to help some of the 3,000 British personnel and their families get home.

Eurotunnel said the busiest period was between 6pm last night and 10am today, when an increased service of four trains per hour was running to transport the servicemen.

"As a result of a large influx of soldiers we've been trying to contact people who have booked day trips to France on Friday to see if they would consider travelling on another day," said a spokeswoman for Eurotunnel.

"Failing that we will offer a full refund in addition to offering them another ticket for travel between January and March. It is up to them to decide."



Troop carrier: Eurotunnel are bringing British soldiers home

Passengers travelling today were warned to expect delays when they arrive at Folkestone.

And yet behind this apparently logical explanation, perhaps there lies another story. Look around you this morning. Does anything look different? Anything strike you as strange? A little odd? No? Exactly.

Let us explain. It is perfectly clear that there aren't enough British soldiers in Europe to fill that many trains. Probably aren't enough British soldiers in Britain, come to that. And we all know where Eurostar trains come from, don't we: Brussels and Paris. Not too many British soldiers there.

No, the answer is blindingly clear to anyone familiar with the evil ways of the Continental Europeans.

We're you to have been hanging around the stations last night, there would have been hundreds of soldiers milling around, clad - disguised - in British army uniforms, speaking in heavily accented English. ("Ach ja, we are from der Royal Anglian Regiment, vot a cholly good show," etc). They embarked yesterday in Paris and Brussels, each briefed on how to live undercover in British society ("Crikey, a pint of English warm bitter there, my man.")

It all fits together, of course. Think about it: the building of the tunnel. The ousting of Maggie. The Maastricht treaty. Reductions in British forces. The election of the Socialists in May.

Then, picking their timing very carefully - every red-blooded patriot will have been celebrating the marriage of William and Ffion last night, after all - the Euro-corps floods across, the snow still fresh on their boots. And where do they arrive? Waterloo, of course.

The real explanation may lie in changes in Army regulations that mean leave cannot be rolled over into the next year. But that, of course, is much less interesting.

— Andrew Marshall

PEOPLE



Boom boom: Basil hopes to find a new straight man for his television series next year

Basil the punning fox is back from his travels

Basil Brush, the glove puppet fox with the infectious laugh and the unremitting puns, is to be relaunched with his own television show next year.

Since the end of his last series in 1982 the well-dressed star of children's television has been living in secluded retirement with his creator Ivan Owen. But on 4 July this year, Mr Owen signed Basil over in a secret deal with Southampton entrepreneur and ardent Brush fan, Bill Haslam, who immediately formed a new company — Boom! Boom! Ltd.

Armed with one of the two original glove puppets, the company began a search for a new voice for Basil.

"We want to keep Basil just as he was," said Mr Haslam, "so we have been auditioning since the summer for the right person. We think we have found the perfect successor, but we can't release the name of the new voice yet."

This week Mr Haslam has clinched a substantial finance deal with investment capitalists Guinness-Mahon and he will now be able to produce the new television series himself.

"We have had a lot of interest from several channels, but there is no deal yet. We hope Basil will be back on screen before the end of next year."

While the resurrected Basil is still a confirmed bachelor, there are some changes planned.

"There was never much said about Basil's relatives in the previous series, but we will be introducing several new family members and friends in the next series," Mr Haslam explains. "Topically enough, one of his friends is called Harry the Hound."

Since the days of his TV stardom Basil has been successfully investing on the stock market and is now a wealthy fox with his own country manor house.

"A number of his friends will live in the woods around his home," reveals Mr Haslam. "but Basil has also travelled extensively in the last few years and will be re-living plenty of his foreign adventures."

All the changes to the Brush format have apparently been made with the full approval of Mr Owen.

"Ivan has been consulted all the way along. He is a charming man and I think he has just decided to take things easy these days. He did make an appearance with Basil as a guest team manager on *Fantastix* recently, but apart from that he has done nothing on television."

One question remains: who will follow in the footsteps of Mr Derek, Mr Roy and, way back in the mists of time, Rodney Bewes, as Basil's trusty straight man?

"We are looking at the suggestion of Noddy Holder from Slade, which would be good," said Mr Haslam. "But again, nothing has been signed yet."

— Vanessa Thorpe

Hindley returns to jail after hospital tests

Myra Hindley was back behind bars yesterday afternoon after being taken to hospital hours after hearing that she is to spend the rest of her life in prison.

The Moors murderer was moved to hospital under police guard last night when staff at Durham Prison became concerned about her health.

But after undergoing tests yesterday she arrived back at the jail's women's wing at lunchtime. A prison spokesman would not comment on her condition.

Hindley, 55, had spent yester-

day in her cell after being told that the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Bingham, had ruled she should never be freed.

Staff reported that she became increasingly upset as it sunk in that her bid for freedom had failed.

Her short stay in a single room at Dryburn Hospital, Durham, where she was kept under guard, was the first time she had left prison in nearly three years.

Fears for her safety had kept her away from the London court hearing. She has served 31 years since she was jailed in 1966 as Ian

Hindley, 55, had spent yester-

day in her cell after being told that the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Bingham, had ruled she should never be freed.

Her lawyers challenged the decision of former Home Secretary Michael Howard last February, reinstated in November by his successor Jack Straw, that she will die behind bars.

But yesterday in the High Court Lord Bingham and two senior judges unanimously ruled that the Home Secretary is entitled to keep her locked up.

Hindley has been given leave to appeal against the ruling.

Spielberg 'panicked' by stalker who wanted to rape him

Steven Spielberg, the director of *Jurassic Park* and *Schindler's List*, whose latest film, *Anatidae*, has brought the horrors of slavery to American screens, was reduced to panic and distraction from film-making by a convicted criminal who stalked him.

Court records released by the judge this week in Los Angeles quote Mr Spielberg as saying that he became "completely panicked", had nightmares and couldn't focus after learning that a man accused of stalking him had been arrested near his home, armed with razors, a knife, masking tape, and a plan to rape him.

The man, Jonathan Norman, was detained in July after a chase through the elite Los Angeles suburb of Pacific Palisades. Police found a *Jurassic Park* sticker, a videotape of the film *ET* and cut-out pictures of dinosaurs in his car. He was on parole after serving a prison term for assault. A police detective, Paul Wright, said Norman told him he had an obsession: "He believed that [Spielberg] wanted to be raped by him."

— Mary Dejevsky

UPDATE

HEALTH

Pill scare increased teenage abortion

The rate of abortion among teenagers rose by nearly 16 per cent in the year following the Pill scare - double that among all women.

Abortions rose overall by 8 per cent in 1996 - the first increase since

1990. The number of legal abortions in England and Wales fell from

177,495 in 1996 compared with 163,638 in 1995.

The Pill scare followed a government warning in October 1995 that the

"generation" Pills carried a small but increased risk of causing blood clots.

The rate amongst teenagers rose more sharply partly because as a

group they are disproportionately affected by a rise. But a spokesman for the Birth Control Trust said younger women using the Pill had

more likely to stop because "they had not experienced its benefits as much as older women".

• Abortion statistics: legal abortions carried out under the 1967 Abortion Act in England and Wales, 1996 is available from The Stationery Office price £2.20

— Glenda Cooper, Social Affairs Correspondent

SAFETY

'None for the road' gains favour

Britons think it should be a case of "none for the road", according to a survey. Almost three quarters said the law should be changed to make it an offence for people to consume any alcohol if they are driving.

Drivers supported the idea even more strongly than non-drivers, es

pecting the idea even more strongly than non-drivers, according to NOP, which polled 993 adults aged 15 years and over in Britain.

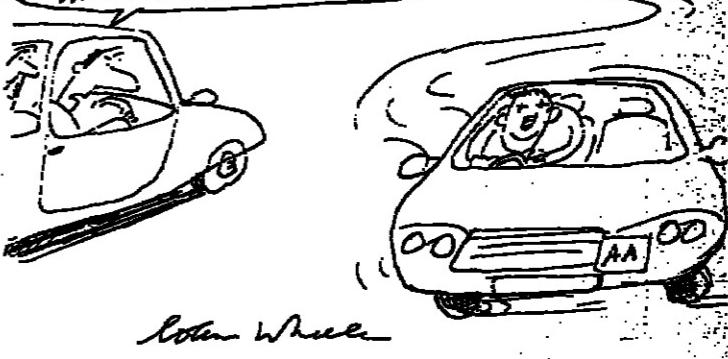
Eight out of ten people think the law should be changed to allow police to make random tests for alcohol and drugs in the bloodstream. Only

one fifth of people said existing laws should be left as they are.

"With Christmas approaching, drinking and driving is always a topical issue," said Tom Lee, NOP consumer research director. "These findings ... demonstrate the level of strong support ... for tougher drink-driving laws. This reflects the tone of the Government's current anti-drinking and driving campaign."

— Glenda Cooper, Social Affairs Correspondent

IN HIS CASE IT STANDS FOR ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS



HOSPITALS

Clowning around on the cancer ward

Dr Giraffe and Dr Babyface, equipped with medical bags containing fart whistles, puppets and red noses, are helping children cope with cancer. As clowns, they play tricks on the real doctors, dance, squirt water and give the children a handle on their fear.

The value of the clowns as members of the medical team in a children's cancer unit in France is described in the *Lancet*. They perform "red nose transplants", and make balls that could be tumours appear and disappear. In one case, a seven year old boy encased in plaster was symbolically crowned as a king and then invested with powers to order the clowns to play absurd tricks. This ritual enabled him to preserve his pride and become more accepting of his treatment.

— Jeremy Lorraine, Health Editor

TOURIST RATES

Australia (dollars)	2.46	Italy (lira)	2.88
Austria (schillings)	20.07	Japan (yen)	21.78
Belgium (francs)	59.05	Malta (lira)	0.62
Canada (\$)	2.30	Netherlands (guilders)	3.22
Cyprus (pounds)	0.83	Norway (kroner)	11.76
Denmark (kroner)	10.95	Portugal (escudos)	289.53
France (francs)	9.56	Spain (pesetas)	240.93
Germany (marks)	2.86	Sweden (kroner)	12.59
Greece (drachmai)	453.56	Switzerland (francs)	2.32
Hong Kong (\$)	12.48	Turkey (lira)	324.350
Ireland (pounds)	1.10	USA (\$)	1.62

Source: Thomas Cook
Rates for indication purposes only

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NEWSPAPERS SUPPORT RECYCLING

Recycled paper made up 41.4% of the raw material for UK newspapers in the first half of 1997.



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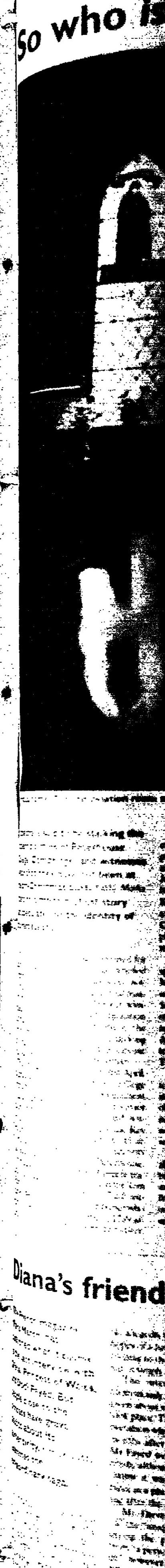
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BBC



So who is the ghost of Peterhouse?



Spiritual home: The combination room at Peterhouse in Cambridge, where first two butlers and then the senior bursar saw the unidentified spectre. Photograph: Andrew Buurman

A spectre is said to be stalking the ancient cloisters of Peterhouse College, Cambridge, and witnesses swear that they have not been at the pre-Christmas port. Kathy Marks listens to a modern ghost story and speculates on the identity of this restless soul.

As the fellows of Peterhouse convened for lunch yesterday in the college's oak-panelled combination room, their minds were not, for once, absorbed by lofty intellectual matters. Instead, the talk at high table was dominated by one subject: a ghostly apparition that has been seen by three people in the very room in which the dorms were tucked into their noisettes of lamb, dauphinoise potatoes and blackcurrant cheesecake.

The first sighting, by two butlers last April, was greeted with scepticism by the college community. But last month no less eminent a figure than Andrew Murison, the senior bursar, reported that he, too, had witnessed a visitation. Now the dean, the Rev Graham Ward, is considering an exorcism.

Speculation about the spectre's identity has reached fever pitch at Peterhouse, Cambridge's oldest and most fiercely traditional college, and the inspiration for Tom Sharpe's novel *Ponchouse Blue*. The front-runner is Francis Daws, a former bursar who hanged himself from a bell rope in 1789 after the election of a very unpopular master.

But with a history stretching back to the college's foundation in 1284, there are plenty of candidates among former fellows and alumni. The ghost, say some, could be James Mason, staging a posthumous comeback after his glittering film career. Or Kingsley Amis, the late novelist, returned to gather material for a sequel to *Lucky Jim*. Or James Clarke Maxwell, the 19th-century physicist, eager to show off his electromagnetism equations to a modern audience.

If political demise released wandering spirits, the field would be even wider. Michael Portillo and Michael Howard were both students at Peterhouse in the Seventies, when the college was a hothouse of ultra right-wing ideas. Mr Portillo's mentor at Peterhouse, which admitted women only in 1985, was Maurice Cowling, the historian who was highly influential during the Thatcher years.

The dean's plan to hold a requiem Mass to exorcise the spirit, whoever he may be, is pooh-poohed by Mr Murison. "A load of old numbo jumbo," he said. "Anyways, he's not causing anyone any harm. It's not as if women undergraduates are throwing themselves out of windows."

Mr Murison, formerly an agnostic about ghosts, entered the dimly lit combination room late one evening and became aware of "a presence" in one corner. "At first I thought it was Max Perutz, one of our Nobel Prize winners, because he's smallish, slightly built and balding," he said. "It was wearing a wide collar, like a pilot's.

grim, and seemed to be holding a large hat. I moved closer to get a better look. I wasn't frightened in the slightest; I was more concerned about frightening it away. It was very benign. After a few seconds, it quietly disappeared. The room was very cold, although a fire was still burning in the grate. It was quite an extraordinary experience. I didn't mention it to the other fellows for a while. I'm supposed to be a financial administrator, not some nutcase who goes around seeing ghosts."

It was in the same 600-year-old room that Matthew Speller and fellow butler, Paul Davies, had seen a "cigar-shaped, personalised apparition" moving slowly towards a bay window, about a foot off the ground. "When we first told the fellows about it, they treated it as a bit of fun," Mr Speller said.

Graduates of Peterhouse, who include Peregrine Worsthorne, the former *Sunday Telegraph* editor, say it is a perfect setting for a haunting. "It's definitely got vibes," said one. The fellows, anxious to protect their reputation for intellectual rigour, are divided. Dr James Carleton Paget, a divinity don, said: "I can vouch for the good witness of the bursar. He is a hard-headed financier who is a creature of the Enlightenment rather than of the pulpit."

But Lord Dacre, the historian, and former master of the college, said: "I was aware of some poltergeists in human form, but I never heard of any less substantial apparitions. Some people, even fellows of Peterhouse, will believe anything."

Diana's friends say 'interview' is fake

The French magazine 'Paris Match' has published what it claims is the last interview with Diana, Princess of Wales, and Dodi Fayed. But people close to the princess have grave doubts about its authenticity. Kim Sengupta examines the extraordinary saga.

In the preface to its "world exclusive" interview with the princess and Dodi Fayed, *Paris Match* editor Roger Therond writes: "This couple, united and looking forward to the future, speak to us, as if from beyond the grave". What follows over four pages, is in a similar sugary, gushy vein, with the cou-

ple allegedly talking about their hopes of a future together. According to those who knew Diana, it simply does not ring true.

The interview is written anonymously, and no details are given about when and where it took place. There is also no explanation why it surfaced three months after the princess and Mr Fayed were killed in a car crash, although the magazine claims it was told about the piece in a phone call the morning after the accident.

Mr Therond "authenticated" the "unique document" by saying the phone call came from "a person I know and value"; however, he would not say who this was.

The only other person who vouched the interview's veracity was Dodi's father, Mohamed Al Fayed. But there is discrepancy about the timing of

the interview between *Paris Match* and Mr Fayed.

The magazine claims it took place while Diana and Dodi were on holiday in the south of France few weeks before their death, when Mohamed Al Fayed was the host. But according to friends of the couple, their romance was yet to begin. And the Harrod's owner claims that in fact the interview took place towards the end of Diana and Dodi's last holiday at the end of August.

Mr Fayed's backing for *Paris Match* has become more qualified over time. When the news of the interview first broke, his spokesman stated categorically: "We can confirm that the interview did happen at the end of their last holiday, at the end of August." By yesterday afternoon, this had changed to: "Mr Al Fayed is aware that an in-

terview took place towards the end of their last holiday together. As he has not been party to the content of that interview, it's impossible to say whether or not it was this interview".

Coincidentally, the interview, which painted Mr Fayed in a positive light, appeared in the British newspapers the day after an ITV documentary titled *Sex, Lies and Audiotape* alleged that he molested and harassed female members of the store's staff.

Friends of the princess were dismissive about the piece. Some recalled Mr Fayed's involvement in another controversy in which he alleged Diana had uttered some secret last words as she lay dying after the crash, an account of events which had been strongly disputed by medical staff at the scene.

YOUR CHRISTMAS INDEPENDENT

CHRISTMAS EVE
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5/FOOD & DRINK

Wine drinkers show a nose for quality

The British are becoming a nation of wine buffs with a particular penchant for reds and rosés. Nathalie Del Molin and Clare Gammie look at how educated drinkers are changing the market.

Growth in the amount of wine drunk in Britain is coming from established consumers who are increasing their knowledge of what they drink as well as the amount. While the number of British adults quaffing wine is declining, those who do are taking their drinking seriously.

Last year, 678 million litres of wine were sold in Britain – a rise of 16 per cent since 1992 – and the value of the wine market is forecast to rise by 25 per cent in current terms by 2001. Around a quarter of annual sales are made in November and December as wine becomes more popular not only for drinking in the festive season but for giving as a present.

According to the latest survey by Mintel, the biggest wine drinkers are aged between 35 and 44. This age group is expected to buy 10 per cent more

wine by 2001. People in this age group are the most likely to change their drinking habits and shift to wine. Those who enter this age group in future will have a greater awareness about wine than previous generations and are expected to be more enthusiastic wine consumers.

Nick Taylor-Stoddard, a 32-year-old City moneybroker, describes himself as an "enthusiastic amateur". Two years ago he became interested in wines, particularly those from the New World, and has since built up a collection of 200 bottles. "I've read books because I want to have a bit of understanding but at the end of the day there's no substitute for trying the stuff," he said.

The UK trend for more wine drinking is part of a general increase in the world market towards alcoholic drinks. Traditional beer drinking countries such as the UK and Germany have been increasing their consumption of wine while, conversely, those countries where wine has been the main drink, such as France and Italy, have been turning towards beer.

In recent years, the reds and rosés have overtaken the whites in popularity. Sales of red and rosé wines have expanded by 53 per cent since 1992 and by

2001 they will account for 55 per cent of the market.

A spokesman from Sainsbury confirms the supermarket chain's customers are increasingly choosy about their wine. The introduction of informative leaflets and the use of labels to identify the characteristics of wines have helped educate the public about wine.

"We sell more red wine than medium sweet white wine nowadays. Our sales are roughly 55 per cent of red wine against 45 per cent for dry white wine," he said.

"Our customers have certainly more awareness about wine. This is mainly due to the advent of New World wine producers such as Australia, Chile, South Africa, US and others which offer good quality and reliable wine at competitive prices. These wines are more accessible to people than French wines."

A spokeswoman for Waitrose said: "The sale of wine is increasing, and people are more knowledgeable about wine. It is down to the variety of what is available in shops, particularly in supermarkets. People want quality. It is no longer for better-off people only. The increase in wine consumption is coming from the whole society."



Serious drinker: Wine consumers in the UK are becoming more knowledgeable and more choosy

Photograph: Philip Meech

Poverty-stricken Albania offers the recipe for a longer life

Albania is the poorest country in Europe, yet you are likely to live longer there than in some richer nations. Researchers say that is probably due to the type of food they eat. Glenys Cooper, Social Affairs Correspondent, looks at the 'Albanian paradox'.

If you are born in Albania and survive until you're 15, you are likely to live as long as someone in the United Kingdom despite the fact that the country is so much poorer and people have limited access to health services.

The reason for the low adult mortality is probably the Albanian diet, which is high in fruit, vegetables and olive oil and low in animal fat. The researchers who carried out a survey into death rates said that it added to mounting evidence linking the so-called "Mediterranean diet" – favoured in countries such as Greece and Italy – with low rates of heart disease. Low consumption of meat and milk products has repeatedly been shown to provide protection against a

range of chronic diseases, especially the heart problems that plague rich nations.

Albania was previously most famous for extreme poverty and extreme devotion to Norman Wisdom films (during the Communist regime of Enver Hoxha, Wisdom's movies were among the very few Western

films allowed, and he is now a national hero). But from research just published in *The Lancet* medical journal, it now appears that the country has much to teach its wealthier neighbours about health.

Albanian women live to an average of 74.2 years and men to 67.8 years, about the

same as Britons. Arjan Gjonca of the London School of Economics found in the first verified mortality data from the former Communist nation. The rate of heart disease was 41 per 100,000 in Albania – half that of Britain but similar to that of Italy. Mortality was lowest in the south-west,

where most of the olives, fruits and vegetables are grown and consumed. Death rates in the north-east were almost double those of the south-west. "In the hilly north-east, much of the food and fat is of animal origin. By contrast, the diet in the south-west is typically Mediterranean, with high intakes

of olive oil and fresh fruit and vegetables," Mr Gjonca wrote in *The Lancet*. "No other factor offers more plausible explanation for the regional mortality pattern."

In Hungary and Poland, where the diet includes large quantities of meat and animal fats, death rates from cardiovascular and coronary disease are two to three times as high as those in Albania and life expectancy is lower. Adult mortality in Portugal is also higher than in Albania. Albania's alcohol consumption was reported to be the lowest in Europe, the people were not heavy smokers and most undertook some physical activity. Road deaths were low because of few cars.

In contrast to the low adult mortality rate,

the infant death rate was among the highest in Europe at 41.6 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990, but the study said that this was to be expected because of widespread deprivation and poor medical services.

"The case of Albania is relevant for primary prevention elsewhere," wrote Mr Gjonca. "The high adult life expectancy despite economic misery and modest health services provides a prospect of an effective and palatable preventive policy."

— Andrew Gumbel

OLIVE OIL, SALADS, FRUIT AND FREE-RANGE MEAT, AND CIGARETTES WITH EVERYTHING

It was a glorious spring day. We were sitting in the ruins of Skanderbeg's castle in Krusha, in the hills just a few miles north of Tirana, with the entire coastal plain of Albania glistening before our eyes. And just for a moment we were lulled into believing this was a glorious, untroubled country.

The food and drink certainly helped: a succulent rack of lamb, a great salad, perfect chips and a light Albanian red to wash it all down. It seems inappropriate, almost absurd, to think of Albania in terms of its cuisine, but it undeniably excels in that department.

The meat is undoubted by hormones

or battery farming techniques. The vegetables are as fresh and tasty as any in the Mediterranean – the carrots and cherries on sale by the roadside outside Kavaja once kept a carload of us at least half sane through a barrage of Kalashnikov rounds on the way down to Vlora.

The oil is a bit patchier. The olive groves near Fier are, botanically speaking, every bit as fertile as their Italian counterparts, but many of them have been spoilt by reckless petroleum exploration that has flooded the fields with what might politely be described as the wrong kind of oil.

There is no single Albanian culinary

tradition to speak of, rather a confluence of cooking styles from Italy, Greece and Turkey. My regular family hosts in Tirana, who are ethnic Greeks by origin, have time and again offered me what they call "classic Albanian dishes" that turn out to be stuffed vine leaves, *souvlaki* and the rest. Pizza is a big hit with the young trendies in Tirana (that is, those who aren't firing automatic weapon rounds out of their windows every evening), and you can find some first-rate Italian restaurants at knock-down prices.

Tasty it undeniably is. But healthy? Albanian hospitality being a phenomenon unto itself, I have never failed to overeat, and over-drink. Poverty does not make this an option for many people.

But then, no matter how short of money they are, Albanians always curb the health potential of any meal with at least 10 cigarettes. They told *The Lancet* they don't smoke? They were just trying to make a good impression.

If you are wondering where you might sample Albanian food in London, the answer may be simpler than you think: many of London's Italian restaurants and cafés (including some of the better-known ones) are actually run by Albanians.

— Andrew Gumbel

Notice to Halifax saving and banking customers.

The Halifax is happy to announce another interest rate increase for the New Year on its saving and certain banking products effective from 1st January 1998.

ACCOUNT	UK rates				Non-resident rates				Non-personal rates			
	GROSS p.a. %	GROSS CAR. %	NET p.a. %	NET CAR. %	GROSS p.a. %	GROSS CAR. %	NET p.a. %	NET CAR. %	GROSS p.a. %	GROSS CAR. %	NET p.a. %	NET CAR. %
HALIFAX TESSA 2 Variable Rate	7.25	-	-	-	7.25	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Including maturity bonus	7.71	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Matured TESSA	7.25	-	5.80	-	7.25	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
BONUS GOLD	7.50	-	6.00	-	7.35	-	7.10	-	5.68	-	-	-
(including bonus)	7.00	-	5.60	-	6.85	-	6.70	-	5.36	-	-	-
£100,000+	6.60	-	5.28	-	6.45	-	6.30	-	5.04	-	-	-
£25,000+	6.30	-	5.04	-	6.15	-	6.10	-	4.88	-	-	-
Monthly Income Option	-	6.50	4.85	4.97	-	6.35	-	6.10	4.55	4.66	-	-
(Excluding 1% annual bonus)	-	6.00	4.47	4.57	-	5.95	-	5.70	4.25	4.34	-	-
£100,000+	-	5.60	4.17	4.26	-	5.45	-	5.30	3.94	4.02	-	-
£25,000+	-	5.30	3.94	4.02	-	5.15	-	5.10	3.78	3.86	-	-
60 DAY GOLD	7.20	-	5.76	-	7.05	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
£100,000+	6.65	-	5.32	-	6.50	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
£25,000+	6.35	-	5.08	-	6.20	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
£10,000+	6.10	-	4.88	-	5.95	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
£5,000+	5.60	-	4.48	-	5.45	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Monthly Income Option	6.97	7.20	5.58	5.72	6.83	7.05	-	-	-	-	-	-
£100,000+	6.46	6.65	5.29	5.31	6.50	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
£50,000+	6.17	6.35	4.94	5.05	6.03	6.20	-	-	-	-	-	-
£25,000+	5.94	6.10	4.75	4.85	5.79	5.95	-	-	-	-	-	-
£10,000+	5.46	5.60	4.37	4.46	5.32	5.45	-	-	-	-	-	-
SOLID GOLD	5.85	-	4.68	-	5.70	-	5.65	-	4.52	-	-	-
£50,000+	5.75	-	4.60	-	5.60	-	5.55	-	4.44	-	-	-
£25,000+	5.35	-	4.28	-	5.20	-	5.35	-	4.28	-	-	-
£10,000+	5.10	-	4.08	-	4.95	-	5.00	-	4.00	-	-	-
£5,000+	4.30	-	3.44	-	4.15	-	4.15	-	3.32	-	-	-
Monthly Income Option	5.70	5.85	4.56	4.66	5.56	5.70	5.51	5.65	4.41	4.50	-	-
£50,000+	5.60	5.75	4.48	4.57	5.46	5.60	5.41	5.55	4.33	4.41	-	-
£25,000+	5.22	5.35	4.18	4.26	5.08	5.20	5.22	5.35	4.18	4.26	-	-
£10,000+	4.98	5.10	3.98	4.05	4.84	4.95	4.89	5.00	3.91	3.98	-	-
£5,000+	4.22	4.30	3.38	3.43	4.07	4.15	4.07	4.15	3.26	3.31	-	-

ACCOUNT	UK rates				Non-resident rates				Non-personal rates			
GROSS p.a. %	GROSS CAR. %	NET p.a. %	NET CAR. %	GROSS p.a. %	GROSS CAR. %	NET p.a. %	NET CAR. %	GROSS p.a. %	GROSS CAR. %	NET p.a. %	NET CAR. %	

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Flying Squad in corruption scandal

An officer in Scotland Yard's Flying Squad has turned supergrass and accused up to 30 of his colleagues of drug dealing and corruption. The case, writes Jason Bennett, Crime Correspondent, could be one of the biggest police scandals for decades.

Anti-corruption detectives have raided offices used by the Flying Squad after allegations of corruption by a Metropolitan Police officer charged with drug dealing and burglary.

Members of the Flying Squad - the unit that deals with armed robberies and gained notoriety through the 1970s television series *The Sweeney* - are accused of drug dealing, robbery and destroying evidence in return for bribes.

The investigation is concentrating on the Flying Squad, but other units of the Organised Crime Group are also expected to be examined.

The allegations were made by a 39-year-old detective, who, along with two other former Flying Squad officers, was charged earlier this month with breaking into the home of a drug dealer and with conspiracy to supply cannabis with a street value of £50,000. The serving officer, who has turned informer, has been moved from prison to a safe house.

Last Friday, officers from Scotland Yard's Complaints Investigation Bureau CIB2 carried out an extensive search at the Flying Squad offices on an industrial estate in Walthamstow, east London. Dozens of files documenting current and past criminal investigations are believed to have been removed.

The allegations of corruption are understood to include offi-

cers pocketing drugs seized during raids and then selling them to dealers, removing valuables from scenes of crimes, and falsifying documents.

A police source confirmed that about 30 officers had been named by the informer. A second source described the inquiry as "potentially massive", "we're talking about allegations of serious, widespread corruption," said the source.

There are about 170 officers in the Flying Squad based in four London branch offices and at headquarters.

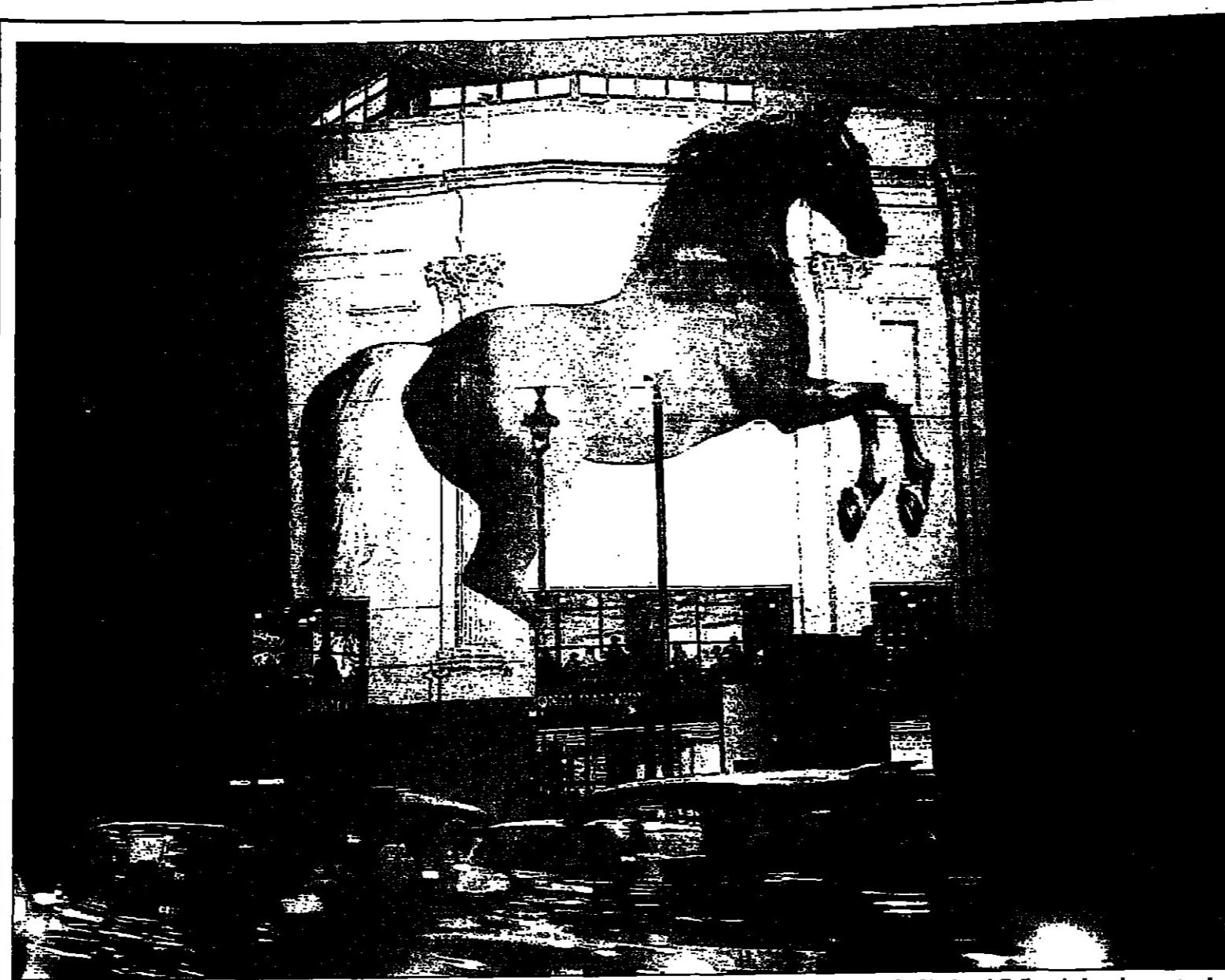
There have been discussions recently about breaking up the unit because the number of armed robberies has declined. Scotland Yard decided it should remain and extend its work to cover other types of crime. If widespread corruption is proved the future of the squad will be re-examined.

Sir Paul Condon, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, has estimated that up to 250 of his 27,000-strong force are corrupt.

The most recent inquiry stemmed from a CIB undercover surveillance operation that ended in the arrest of a 39-year-old detective with 18 years' service, and two former officers aged 40 and 37, who recently returned from medical grounds. The three are remanded in custody.

The three men are accused of breaking into a flat of a drug dealer in Silvertown, east London, and were charged last week with aggravated burglary and conspiracy to supply drugs. CIB allegedly have film which shows the officers breaking in.

In a second case involving Scotland Yard, CIB2 is examining allegations made by a former Metropolitan Police officer who claims former colleagues have been taking bribes, providing illegal documents and running police national computer checks for cash.



Horsing around: Whistlejacket, the 18th-century masterpiece by George Stubbs, projected on to the side of the National Gallery in London yesterday. The painting was acquired for the nation with a lottery grant and will be taken on a tour of the country

Photograph: John Stillwell

Britons feared dead in Indonesian jet crash

Three Britons were among 104 people feared dead last night after a plane crash in Indonesia.

The SilkAir Boeing 737 went down in a swamp on the island of Sumatra midway through a flight from Jakarta to Singapore, where waiting families broke down in tears at the news.

A policeman on duty in Sungai on the coast of the island said: "There was a bang when it crashed. I think there is little chance of survivors."

The 10-month-old plane, the newest in SilkAir's fleet, lost

contact with air traffic controllers and crashed 35 miles north of Palembang in Sumatra.

The airline said it knew of no reports of distress calls from the plane and had no information on casualties.

Debris was strewn over the marshy area and parts of the aeroplane were submerged. It was understood that the plane crashed in the Musi River which winds through a swamp on its way to the sea, and most of the wreckage sank quickly.

Rescue operations were be-

ing hampered by heavy rain, although the weather at the time of the crash was said to be fine.

It is Indonesia's monsoon season.

Rescuers were expected to be joined by a team from the US-based Boeing Co. to assist in the investigation.

A spokesman for the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS) said: "It's basically mountainous, a forest area."

There were 97 passengers,

including a woman and two men from Britain, and seven crew. The crew were thought to be Singaporean apart from the pilot who was a New Zealander. The passengers were mainly Asian with some Americans and Europeans.

from Britain, and seven crew. The crew were thought to be Singaporean apart from the pilot who was a New Zealander. The passengers were mainly Asian with some Americans and Europeans.

Touch with the British embassy in Jakarta.

He confirmed that one British woman and two men were on board the flight, but there were no details.

"Our first duty will be to make sure the families are made aware of what has happened," he said.

SilkAir is a regional holiday arm of Singapore Airlines, flying mainly on routes in Southeast Asia, and has had no previous crashes.

— Louise Jury

Police launch abuse inquiry

A third Welsh police force has launched an investigation into claims of abuse at children's homes. Gwent Police yesterday set up a special squad to examine fresh allegations and has appealed for anyone who was abused at homes in the county in the Seventies and Eighties to come forward.

The investigation comes three days after the extension of a major inquiry by neighbouring South Wales Police which is now looking into 250 allegations of physical and sexual abuse covering 33 residential homes.

With the investigation carried out by North Wales Police, the Gwent operation takes the number of children's homes in Wales that have or are being investigated for abuse to 101 - almost three times as many as the number of homes left in the Principality.

And the number of allegations of abuse made by children in care who lived at residential homes in Wales, mainly in the Seventies and Eighties, is now approaching 900.

The Gwent allegations were originally received by South Wales Police where 42 detectives have been running Operation Goldfinch. Eleven former residents have so far made complaints.

Detective Superintendent Ian Johnstone, of Gwent Police, said yesterday: "I am eager to address these matters as priorities and we will speak to the people concerned as soon as possible. For the victims the whole issue of abuse is both sensitive and painful and, with this in mind, we would like to hear from anyone who was living in a children's home in Gwent in the late Seventies and Eighties who suffered abuse."

● Gwent Police helpline is 01633 838111. South Wales Police is 01656 869484

— Roger Dobson

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Can pay, won't pay! Shirley Porter, gerrymandering former leader of Westminster City Council. Photograph: John Voss

Money may never be repaid as riches lie out of reach

Dame Shirley Porter, the former Westminster City Council leader, was yesterday found liable for over £27m for a policy of selling council houses to likely Tory voters. But, according to Ian Burrell, the money may never be repaid.

The whistle-blower was a grey-haired GP who was appalled at having to treat the ill-health of homeless families when council properties were boarded up all around his surgery.

But in February 1988, when Richard Stone alerted the Westminster City auditor to the Conservative council's policy of selling council homes in marginal wards to people likely to be their political supporters, he can have had little idea of what he had set in motion.

John Magill, the man tasked with carrying out the inquiry, embarked on a seven-year investigation which involved 130 interviews with 44 people.

Dame Shirley, the leader of the ruling Tory group, was interviewed 12 times.

He finally concluded that Dame Shirley and her colleagues had been responsible for a policy of "disgraceful and improper gerrymandering" and calculated that their actions had cost the council £31m, for which they were liable. Yesterday, after a two-month appeal, three High Court judges upheld the auditor's verdict in respect

of Dame Shirley and her deputy David Weeks, while clearing three colleagues of liability.

The scheme, said Lord Justice Rose, was Dame Shirley's "tragedy". He said that she and her deputy, David Weeks, had known that the policy was unlawful in marginal wards but had tried to disguise it by presenting it as a city-wide gentrification programme.

"Their purpose throughout was to achieve unlawful electoral advantage. Knowledge of the unlawfulness and such deliberate dressing-up both inevitably point to wilful misconduct on behalf of each of them."

The judges ruled that the policy had cost Westminster £27m in lost rents, discounts on sales, housing the homeless elsewhere and other costs. Whether she will pay is another matter. It is believed that Dame Shirley, who now lives in Israel, has already placed her assets outside the reach of the authorities. She has resigned all but one of her directorships in Britain, sold her homes in London and reduced her shareholding in Tesco, founded by Sir Jack Cohen, her father.

Westminster has employed forensic accountants to identify assets but sources admit that even the £31m cost of the inquiry might not be retrievable.

Mr Weeks, who is still a Westminster councillor and who will face calls for his resignation, now faces financial ruin unless Dame Shirley, who is a close friend and has an estimated personal wealth of £70m, bail him out.

7/A DAME'S DEMISE

How homes for votes caused downfall of the Iron Lady of local politics

The homes for votes scandal has virtually driven Dame Shirley Porter into exile in Israel. A decade ago, says Ian Burrell, she was the publicity-hungry Iron Lady of local government, with a family fortune and friends in high places.

Shirley Porter grew up in the East End but her dad was no ordinary barrow-boy. Sir Jack Cohen was the founder of the Tesco supermarket empire and his daughter completed her education at Swiss finishing school.

Yet her political style owed more to the hard-nosed business style of her father than her

classes in Switzerland where she "learned to ski and little else". After becoming leader of Westminster city council in 1983, her domineering approach was rivalled only by the then prime minister Margaret Thatcher.

Dame Shirley was known to reduce grown men to tears and dismissed her critics as a "bunch of oddballs and gutter-sniping scumballs". Yesterday in a High Court judgment, Lord Justice Rose said she was "a councillor of high ability, great experience, formidable personality and single-minded determination".

That confidence was founded in part on her great personal wealth. The Tesco millions ensured that she was among the top 20 richest women in Europe with a fortune estimated at between £58m and £70m.

Dame Shirley has said that she only discovered politics when her daughter Linda left home to begin studying at Oxford University, leaving her mother with "empty nest syndrome". She had married her husband Leslie when she was just 18. He was then a car mechanic but went on to become chairman of Tesco.

Dame Shirley tore into her new career with a spirit which was summed up by her motto YCDBSOYA, standing for "You Can't Do Business Sitting On Your Ass".

She made her name by standing for office on a platform of cleaning the rubbish from the streets of London.

Like Lady Thatcher she was also known for preaching the virtues of good housekeeping.

Her true blue policies de-

lighted the prime minister as Westminster competed for the title of Tory flagship local authority and reduced its poll tax to the second lowest in Britain.

Her reputation, she has admitted, was of a "powerful, fearsome creature", though she considers herself a "shy, retiring, lovely person". Over the years she has given millions of pounds to charities.

But the means which she employed to attain her successes were later to backfire.

When in 1987 it was revealed that she had sold three cemeteries for £8 each to a Panamanian company to save on a £400,000 maintenance bill there was widespread outrage. The council later bought the cemeteries back for £50 in a secret deal which cost tax-payers £2m.

But it was the homes for

votes affair which she first embarked on after the 1986 local elections that was to really undermine her.

During her High Court appeal against an auditor's decision to make her subject to a £31m surcharge over the policy, she admitted that the way her actions had been criticised had left her deeply depressed.

"I was so upset at the way all the work that we had done had been interpreted that I blotted it out," she said.

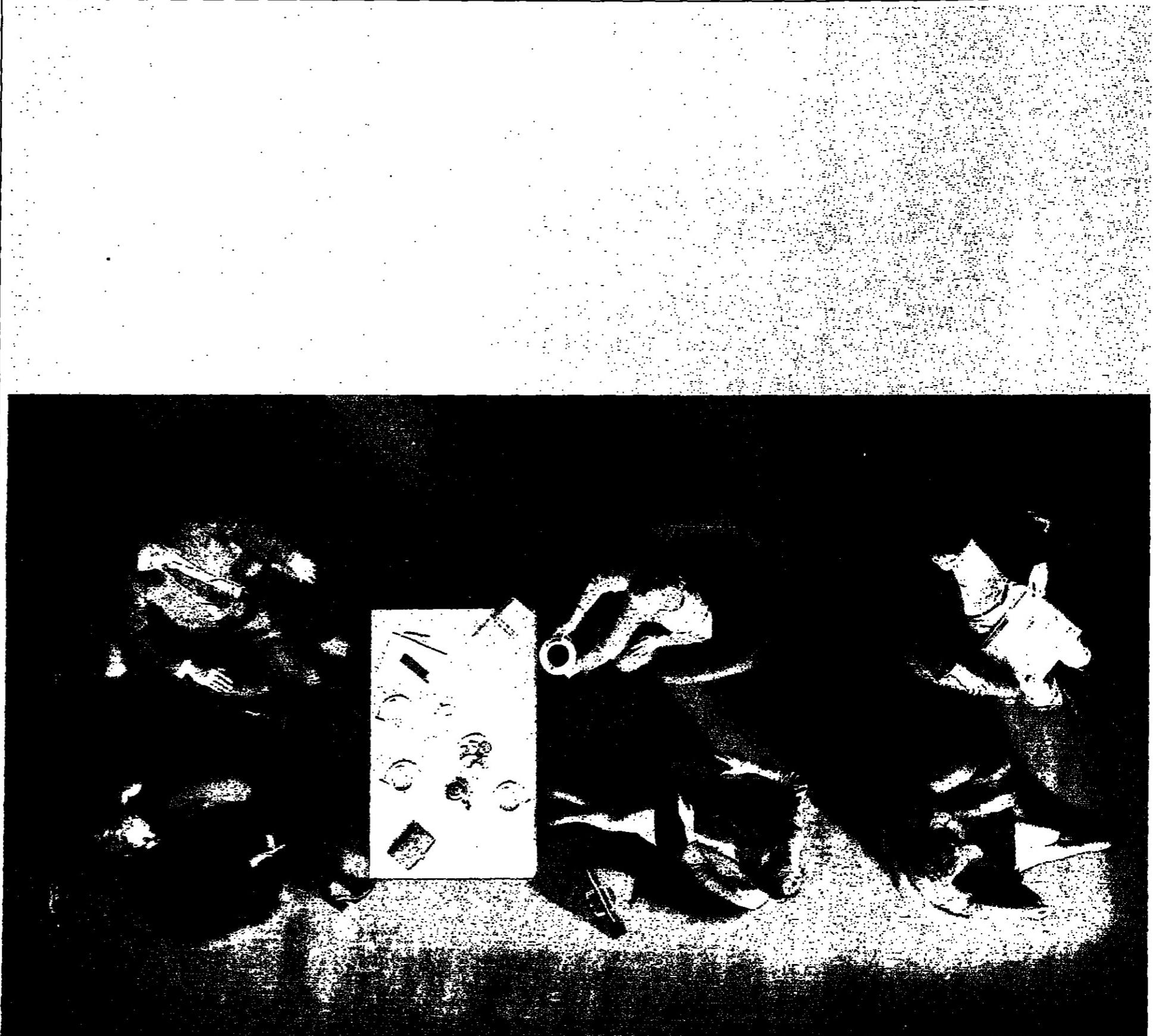
During two days of evidence in October she was nothing like her old self, looking unsure and uncomfortable under questioning.

She admitted she was "not known for a great grasp of detail" and claimed "I don't think I was on the bridge at all times".

The affair killed off her hunger for publicity and for the past four years the woman who was once synonymous with Britain's capital has lived in Tel Aviv. She left the country in 1991.

In November 1993 Dame Shirley and her husband flew to Israel, where their daughter Linda had emigrated following the death of her 21-year-old son Daniel in a car crash. The Porters, whose London home had been damaged in a fire shortly before the tragedy, have lived in Israel ever since.

He added that after the election of 1986, Dame Shirley had become "determined that the Conservative Party which she led would at the 1990 elections, have a greater majority than that which they had narrowly achieved".



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Smiling, I held out my near-empty coffee cup across the table.

Sitting face to face also allowed the conversation to continually flow, as the Mercedes V-class effortlessly wended its way toward our destination. Stretching out, I had to remind myself that our luggage was securely stored behind us.

From the corner of an eye, I noticed the verdant scenery blur by

like the brushstrokes of an impressionist painting.

Although, if truth be told, the whole experience seemed slightly more surreal. After all, who has ever heard of a room travelling along at a steady sixty miles an hour?

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MP's inquiry blocked by 'furtive' Labour

Despite plans for a Freedom of Information Act there are some questions an MP is simply not allowed to ask. The Tory MP John Redwood last night accused the Government of 'furtive' behaviour. Fran Abrams, Political Correspondent, uncovers the details.

MPs are no longer allowed to ask questions about individual companies, John Redwood says. Last week the Conservative MP was refused permission to table a written question about the affairs of *New Statesman* magazine, which is owned by the Paymaster General, Geoffrey Robinson. He also had efforts to dig out information rejected on the grounds that his inquiries were "hypothetical". In both cases, similar questions had been answered by the Tory government.

On Thursday Mr Redwood, Tory trade and industry spokesman, tried to ask two questions about why the *New Statesman* had been given an extension of the time permitted to file accounts, and what Margaret

Beckett, President of the Board of Trade, intended to do about its failure to file them within the extra month it was given.

He was told the Government would not answer such questions and was referred to a similar question about the Dixons store group which had been rejected on the grounds that it was about an individual company.

However, he points to numerous examples when the previous government answered questions about companies such as Guinness and Poly Peck.

"This Government becomes ever more furtive," Mr Redwood said. "It is the ultimate cynicism to block off whole areas of legitimate enquiry at the same time as publishing a Freedom of Information White Paper... the Government should be in the dock for giving far less information about itself and

its deeds and misdeeds than any previous government."

Although government departments are not allowed to influence decisions taken by the House of Commons table office, a spokesman for the office said that if a government department refused to answer a question there would be difficulties in tabling a similar one in future.

There were similar gripes about the last government from Llew Smith, the Labour MP for Blaenau Gwent, who has been a long-term campaigner on the issue. But he, too, has had recent difficulties in getting questions answered. An inquiry about the movement of radioactive material by British Nuclear Fuels Ltd was rejected – on grounds of commercial confidentiality rather than for the reason given to Mr Redwood. Shortly afterwards, David Clark, the minister responsible for freedom of information, told Mr Smith there should be greater openness on such matters in future.

A spokesman for the Department of Trade and Industry said Mrs Beckett had been asked about the *New Statesman* by Mr Redwood during oral questions and had promised to write to him.



Ready for a roasting: The annual turkey auction at Saffron Walden in Essex. The heaviest bird was 45lb and sold for £30. Photograph: Brian Harris

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in week saw a small
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situation. Our
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though. There
is a break
in its home land.
crosses the border. It has
been broken - better

BY
PO

Belgium heads EU racism league

Belgium is tops, Britain languishes in the grey zone, and Luxembourg gets nul point. Imre Karacs looks at a survey on Euro-racism.

Sixteen thousand people across the 15 EU countries were asked in a survey to pass judgement on themselves. The results, presented yesterday by the European Commission, show, in the report's words, "a worrying level of racism and xenophobia in member-states".

The dubious distinction of first place goes to Belgium, home of the Commission. According to the study, ordered by Eurocrats to mark the passing of "European Year Against Racism", 22 per cent of Belgians professed to be "very racist" and 33 per cent "quite racist".

Britain weighs in at equal seventh with Germany, with 8 per cent self-confessed "very racist" and 24 per cent "quite racist". A further 33 per cent of Britons considered themselves "a little racist". Only in Luxembourg and Portugal do a majority feel "not at all racist".

Padraig Flynn, the EU commissioner presenting the report, expressed "extreme concern" at the "shocking statistics", but was also able to draw some comfort from the findings. While unemployment was described as the main cause of intolerance, several countries with very high jobless rates appeared to be relatively untainted by racism, whilst more prosperous neighbours were hostile out of all proportion.

The survey shows the complexity of the phenomenon of racism, the report said. "Feelings of racism co-exist with a strong belief in the democratic

system and respect for fundamental social rights and freedoms".

There is, nevertheless, a disquieting link between the various countries' position in the chart and the recent performance of the extreme right. In Belgium, where love-thy-neighbour politics went out of fashion years ago, parties preaching xenophobia have been making headway, especially among the Flemish community.

France, the silver medallist, regularly comes up with a strong vote for Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front National. And a quarter of the Austrian electorate – in third place – put their trust in Jörg Haider's Freedom Party in the last elections. Mr Haider's dislike of foreigners and his high regard for some of Hitler's "achievements" is common knowledge.

Fourth-placed Denmark would at first sight appear to buck the trend. Less than 5 per cent of the country's population are immigrants. Danes are prosperous and by tradition tolerant to newcomers. But in last month's local elections, the xenophobic Danish People Party achieved a breakthrough, thanks in large part to anti-immigrant sentiments whipped up by the tabloid press. With more immigrants still coming, the party appears to have a bright future.

Germany, on the other hand, is showing the opposite trend, at least in the west. After their successes in the early Nineties, extreme right-wing parties are declining, and racist attacks have abated.

Sentiments in the east make barely a blip on the national statistics, but the evidence from east German schools suggests that the racist tide there is again on the rise.

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Solicitor jailed over fraud

A solicitor who swindled building societies out of nearly £600,000 to "prop up" her debt-ridden practice, was jailed for three years yesterday. Anita Bose, 56, of Golders Green, north London, helped by one of her brothers and her accountant during the two-year-long fraud, would have got away with almost £1m if all her "entirely fictitious" mortgage applications had succeeded.

Southwark Crown Court heard all the cash was used to "plug" a huge deficit in the client account of the north London practice of Lipman Bose. The brother who helped her in the swindle, Shankar Das, 58, was convicted of three similar deceptions at an earlier trial and was jailed for 12 months. Accountant, Dilip Chakrabarti, 54, of Edgware, Middlesex, who was found guilty of five deceptions, received a similar sentence.

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9/REINCARNATION

Child lama breathes new life into Buddhism

In Nepal 15,000 people last week saw a small boy enthroned as the reincarnation of a great lama. Our correspondent in Kathmandu finds that although Tibetan Buddhism faces a bleak future in its homeland, across the border it has never looked in better shape

This week, a four-year-old Tibetan boy in a yellow padded jacket and bright red boots began to enjoy his new life in a Buddhist monastery in Nepal. Acclaimed as the reincarnation of one of the most revered Tibetan monks of the century, one of the Dalai Lama's teachers, he showed it in a typically four-year-old way: he refused to go home.

Instead, he led a host of shaven-headed, maroon-robed lamas on a mad dance around the temple precincts, bouncing across the cushions in the prayer hall and racing up and down the stairs, before being gently carried by the abbot to a waiting gold-coloured Mercedes and driven to his parents' home.

The monks' glee at the child's behaviour was unaffected. Enthroned as the Yangsi, or reincarnation, only a week before, Ugyen Tenzin Jigme Lhundrup was for the first time showing he understood where he truly belonged.

This year is proving to be the year when the West's long running love affair with Tibet and its gorgeously elaborate brand of Buddhism turned into a mass-cultural phenomenon.

There was the film *Seven Years In Tibet*, and Martin Scorsese's *Kundun*, which opens in the United States on Christmas Day. A troupe of lama dancers has just returned to Nepal from a tour of Europe where many of their performances were sold out.

In France, the ruminations of Matthieu Ricard, a monk at Shechen, the monastery in Baud-

hanth near Kathmandu where last week's ceremony took place, have become a best seller.

The enthronement of the Yangsi, which took place a little earlier in his life than is normal because 1999 was thought to be inauspicious, made a fine climax.

The crowd numbered 15,000. As well as lamas from the four traditions of Tibetan Buddhism there were also 1,500 foreigners from 52 countries. All craned to see as, at 9 o'clock in the morning on 5 December, to the sound of trumpets, oboes and cymbals, and preceded by a procession of 100 lamas, the Yangsi was carried into the monastery under a huge orange canopy. By noon, the young boy had been enthroned. If he lives up to the hopes of the faithful he will grow up to be as important a figure for Tibetan Buddhism's continuing vitality as he refused to be.

As the young reincarnation sets out on this arduous road, the outlook for Buddhism in his homeland of Tibet is worse than ever. A year ago, Chen Kui Jan became the Communist Party's top man in Tibet, fresh from his achievements in Inner Mongolia where over several years he had succeeded in squashing the resurgent Mongolian identity. He has already had striking success in doing the same thing to Tibet. Under his "patriotic and political re-education programme" he has despatched teams to more than 50 monasteries, where they conduct long, daily re-education meetings reminiscent of China's Cultural Revolution. In these meetings, the "Two headed Serpent" (the Dalai Lama) is denounced and the "fact" that Tibet has always been part of China is emphasised.

Since the enthronement, there have been opportunities to observe the young Yangsi in his new surroundings. The lamas stand around him grinning from a respectful distance, as if he were a newly unwrapped toy and no one was quite sure what it did. None of them would dream of rebuking or even touching him, and people are quick to spot evidence of precocious brilliance. The phrase "spoil to death" goes through one's mind, though as all children in the east are indulged it probably does not apply.

But his life as a budding lama will be tough. In Tibetan Buddhism you may be born to fame, but glory you have to work for. Khyentse Rinpoche, the teacher of the Dalai Lama, of whom the four-year-old is the reincarnation, spent 13 years living in a cave in the mountains and wrote many books before being recognised as a great master. Khyentse Rinpoche is one of my most revered

teachers," wrote the Dalai Lama in *Journey To Enlightenment*, published last year. "[He] did not start out with a high rank in the religious hierarchy, but became great teacher by developing complete and authentic accomplishment... he received teachings from many masters, and instead of just leaving those teachings on the pages of his books, he actually put them into practice."

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At the end of the programme, the monks are required to declare that they will never utter a word in favour of Tibetan liberty. If they refuse, they are expelled from the monastery. Already, Chen's programme has rid the monasteries that have been visited – half the total in central Tibet – of between 50 and 80 per cent of their monks. Chen's latest gambit is to assert that Buddhism is not an intrinsic part of Tibetan culture.

In Baudhanath, Tibetan Buddhism has never looked in better shape: funded by foreign money (including massive donations from Taiwan) new gompas (monasteries) are continually sprouting. Shechen monastery has just inaugurated an elementary school and a course in Buddhist psychology. But none of these achievements compensates for the bitterness of exile.

BY PETER POPHAM

two incarnations before him.

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Tibet's hope: The four-year-old Yangsi or reincarnation, Ugyen Tenzin Jigme Lhundrup, during the ceremony of enthronement

Photograph: Raphael Demandre

FILM STARS SET STYLE OF WORSHIP

Conspicuous among the watching foreigners were the actors Richard Gere and Steven Seagal. The two actors demonstrate the contrasting ways in which Westerners can take to Buddhism. Gere, hunched and lawfully, almost invisible among the crowd in a maroon boubou, has been a Buddhist since he was 20 and a disciple of the Dalai Lama for 15 years.

He has played vigorous part in the campaign to publicise China's brutal policy towards Tibet and while in Nepal last week he visited a Tibetan refugee camp. His demeanour in the monastery was modest and unassuming.

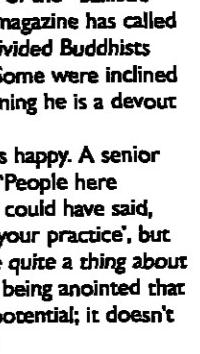
Steven Seagal is a different kind of piety. The action star of *Under Siege*, *On Deadly Ground* and *Hard To Kill* has long been a student of Japanese Buddhism, but several years ago he started getting into Tibet, too.

Last year, the martial arts hunk was declared to be the reincarnation of a great lama. Accordingly, he showed up for last week's ceremony with his 6ft 4in frame draped in a monk's robe. The elevation of the "ballistic mystic", as *Esquire* magazine has called him, shocked and divided Buddhists around the world. Some were inclined to indulge him, claiming he is a devout Buddhist.

Others were less happy. A senior foreign monk said: "People here thought his teacher could have said, 'keep quiet and do your practice', but instead Seagal made quite a thing about it. The point is that being anointed that way means he has potential; it doesn't mean he can teach."

"The mistake on his part will be to start saying 'I'm a guru'. In my opinion his behaviour is mixed up with a lot of ego business."

— Peter Popham



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Breast cancer screening call for over-65s

Extending breast screening to older women would save lives. Jeremy Laurence, Health Editor, on the growing tide of medical and lay opinion urging the Government to act.

There is no longer any doubt that screening women over 65 for breast cancer would reduce the death rate from the disease. Evidence from round the world shows that breast screening is effective up to the age of 75 in saving lives.

A Commons motion signed by more than 30 women MPs is calling on the Government to extend the breast screening programme to women aged 65-69. Under the current programme, women aged 50-64 are invited for screening every three years, but after then the invitations stop and it is left to the women themselves to request screening.

The effect of the policy is that many women think the risk of breast cancer falls at 65 and they do not need screening. But the risk of the cancer and the death rate from it rises with age.

The Commons motion received backing yesterday from experts. Professor Ian Fentiman of Guy's Hospital, London, said: "Women over the age of 65 comprise half the cases of breast cancer in Britain and something like 60 per cent of the deaths. If we were to invite them along for screening, at a conservative estimate, we could probably save 2,000 lives a year."

Dr Robin Wilson, clinical trials co-ordinator, said claims by the charity Age Concern that many older women would die

each year that the Government delayed extension of the screening service to include them were "probably right". "There should be screening for women over 65 and it would save as many and possibly more lives than screening women under 65," he said.

The aim of a screening service was to save lives, not detect cancers and as the age of women rose there would be a point where it would cease to be effective, Dr Wilson said. "The older women get the more likely they are to get breast cancer but the less likely they are to die of it because they die of other things. They die with breast cancer, not from it."

Baroness Jay, the junior health minister, said the Government had spent £10m on improving breast cancer services since the election and was awaiting the outcome of pilot studies on extending screening to older women which would not be available for two years.

"We are committed to improving breast cancer services and we will certainly look at all the evidence we have to make sure that we improve them even more," she said on BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme.

However, Dr Wilson said the three pilot studies – in Nottingham, Leeds and Brighton – were not designed to test the effectiveness of screening in older women, which is accepted, but to assess the logistics of doing so.

Critics say the Government's refusal to act until the results of the pilot studies are available in two years' time is a delaying tactic to save money. Dr Wilson said: "It may be possible to review the initial results of the pilot studies early because by then there may be sufficient evidence on which to plan the extension of screening."

Lorry runs down four sisters

A 10-year-old girl was killed and her three sisters were injured yesterday when they were struck by a roadsweeping lorry on a pedestrian crossing. Police named the dead girl as Stephanie Popat. Three-year-old Selina Shaw was being treated for facial injuries. Natalie Popat, 13, had a suspected fractured skull and facial injuries and Marie McCormack, 19, had head injuries, a broken shoulder and grazes to her face.

A police spokesman said it appeared that a car was stationary at the crossing but the road sweeper failed to stop. The driver, Roger Edwards, in his fifties and of Staffordshire, had not been arrested and was no longer being questioned. • One man died and 13 people were injured when their minibus was involved in an accident with an articulated lorry in heavy rain and thick fog on the A2 in Kent early yesterday morning. The minibus was carrying workers from P&O's freight office in Dover home from a Christmas outing.

Dome show plan shelved

Plans for a theatre show produced by Sir Cameron Mackintosh in the Millennium Dome in Greenwich, south-east London, has been scrapped in favour of a "multi-media spectacular" in an open plaza in the Dome. The change has been made to save costs and eliminate queues. Peter Mandelson, the minister without portfolio, said yesterday that the new plaza would open up "mind-boggling" views across the Dome. A spokesman for the New Millennium Experience Company confirmed that Sir Cameron's production had been shelved.

Nurses remain in Saudi jail

Two British nurses accused of murdering an Australian colleague face at least another year in a Saudi jail, a legal rights campaigner predicted yesterday. Deborah Parry, 39, and Louise McLaughlin, 32, were arrested a year ago and later charged with the murder of Yvonne Gifford in Dammam. Stephen Jakobi, director of the pressure group Fair Trials Abroad, said that despite an "unacceptable" system of justice, diplomatic activity would resolve the situation. "and perhaps a year today they will be home". McLaughlin has been sentenced to eight years in jail and 500 lashes. Parry has not yet been sentenced.

Aids victim wins aid case

A Brazilian dying of Aids who stayed in Britain after his visa expired won his High Court battle against a council's refusal to provide free food and shelter until he is fit enough to go home.

Mr Justice Moses, sitting in London, ruled that despite being an illegal immigrant, the man, referred to as 'D', was entitled to claim assistance because "his life or health would be seriously at risk" should he journey out of the UK.

But the conclusion was "no warrant whatsoever" for illegal entrants or over-stayers to make such a claim if there was no threat to life or health. The man took action against Brent Borough Council, London.

Black job-seeker loses racial bias battle against M&S



Adelle Martins: Took M&S to a tribunal after being turned down for a job in January 1992

Photograph: James Horton/PNS

A fashion buyer yesterday finally lost a six-year battle with Marks & Spencer, the high street giant she accused of refusing her a job because of racial bias.

Adelle Martins, 31, who is black, first complained to an industrial tribunal after she was turned down for a job in January 1992. The tribunal ruled that there had been discrimination and awarded her £3,000 for injury to her feelings and gave her leave to apply for compensation for other losses.

The panel said that she did not get the job because of her ethnic origins and that although Marks & Spencer had taken steps to counter the perception of it as "a white, middle-class organisation", they had had little effect on the staff's ethnic mix. The company took the case to an employment appeals tribunal, which found in May last year that the company had taken "reasonable" steps to eliminate racial discrimination.

Ms Martins, of Wandsworth, south London, went to the Court of Appeal, which yesterday upheld the findings of the employment appeals tribunal. Lord Justice Mummery said the approach of the industrial tribunal was "defective", substituting its own favourable assessment of Ms Martins based on its own observations of her at the tribunal, for that of the Marks & Spencer interviewers. "That is an unsound basis for a finding of less favourable treatment or for a legitimate inference of discrimination on the ground of race."

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(1st - 31st December 1997)

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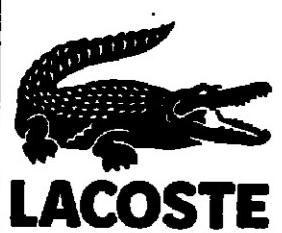
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12/WORLD NEWS

Botha spurns last chance to repent

PW Botha yesterday lost his last chance to appear before South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Mary Braid in Johannesburg says the apartheid-era president risks a prison sentence

Cartoonists always depict PW Botha, 82, the same way: bug-eyed and sanctimonious, wagging his finger at the nation as the edifice of apartheid crumbles.

Mr Botha's failure yesterday to take his third and last chance to comply with a subpoena to appear before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was, therefore, a gift to journalists. "PW gives the TRC the finger," declared one headline. It was crude but accurate.

Mr Botha ignored appeals from the commission's chairman, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and from President Nelson Mandela. His non-appearance at a Cape Town hearing finally forced the commission's hand. Within an hour, Archbishop Tutu, "angry and sad", had laid criminal charges with the Attorney General of Cape Province, Frank Kahn. Mr Botha faces a fine, or two years in jail.

The TRC, charged with uncovering the truth about the brutal apartheid years, bent over backwards to persuade Mr Botha to co-operate. It even offered to take the hearing to Wilderness, the former president's home, a four-hour drive from Cape Town, where ill health was presented as the

problem. The TRC wants to question Mr Botha about the workings of the former State Security Council, which imposed a brutal state of emergency in the late 1980s during which thousands of blacks died in clashes with the police.

It also wants to ask Mr Botha, who has denied sanctioning any killings, about the testimony of Neil Barnard, the former National Intelligence Service chief. Mr Barnard says he personally informed the former president about the killings of activists by the security police.

Yesterday, as Archbishop Tutu waited, a reporter telephoned Mr Botha at his home. He was told the former president was "in the shower".

It is unlikely that yesterday's appointment slipped the old man's mind. A few weeks ago he said the TRC was a "circus" in which he would have no part. The Afrikaners would bow only to God. "I will not ask for forgiveness for fighting the Marxist revolutionary onslaught," he added. Unlike other senior National Party figures he has not asked for amnesty.

It remains to be seen whether right-wing Afrikaners will rally behind Mr Botha. Yesterday, the Conservative Party leader, Ferdi Hartzenberg, said the prosecution proved that the TRC was merely a witchhunt against Afrikaners.

Mr Botha could yet undergo a change of heart. No decision will be made about prosecution until 2 January. In the meantime, he will not be arrested. "To arrest Mr Botha now would be empty posturing," said Mr Kahn yesterday.



Water works: A child leaps to touch aboriginal eel traps, woven from reeds, at a Sydney gallery. Photograph: Reuters

UFO cult alert

About 100 members of a Taiwanese cult have left for a meeting in Dallas, Texas, where officials fear they plan to commit mass suicide. They included many children, because the God Saves the Earth Flying Saucer Foundation cult encourages entire families to kill themselves so that their bodies could be picked up by flying saucers, officials and newspapers said.

The Foreign Ministry said the Taiwanese government had approached the FBI to ensure the safety of the cult members, who left Taiwan recently. The cult has recruited some 200 Taiwanese members in the past few years.

AP - Taipei

New president warns Koreans to tighten belts

South Korea's opposition leader, who won the presidency on Friday after a close vote-count, yesterday promised to abide by stringent conditions attached to an IMF bail-out package.

Kim Dae-jung, a former dissident who suffered imprisonment and torture at the hands of successive army-backed regimes, called on Koreans to prepare to endure hardships in the face of the country's severe economic crisis. He also urged North Korea to resume the di-

logue on peace for the divided peninsula.

South Korea's battered stock market reacted nervously to Mr Kim's victory, with stocks down 3.04 per cent at 405.76 points shortly after trading began.

"I will faithfully abide by agreements between the IMF and the current government," Mr Kim said in his first news conference since winning the presidential election.

Kim got a boost from IMF

Managing Director Michel Camdessus who hailed South Korea's progress in implementing tough fiscal and structural reforms, saying it had taken even more steps than the agency had expected.

Mr Kim had been blamed for worsening South Korea's crisis during the election campaign, by saying to the alarm of foreign investors that he would renegotiate some of the IMF conditions.

He takes the helm of a coun-

try that was forced to swallow its pride and accept the record-breaking bailout package of nearly \$60bn (£37bn) from the IMF earlier this month. The IMF announced it had approved the second tranche of \$21bn in rescue loans.

Mr Kim said he would contact US President Bill Clinton to request co-operation on the economy and would arrange contact with the Japanese Prime Minister, Ryutaro Hashimoto, to discuss both eco-

nomic and security issues. He also said the next government would maintain its strong alliance with the United States, which maintains 37,000 troops in the country.

The ruling party's candidate, Lee Hoi-chang, conceded victory to his rival at 3am yesterday. With all votes counted, Mr Kim had 40.3 per cent followed by Mr Lee with 38.7 per cent. Mr Kim is not due to take office until February 25.

— Reuters, Seoul

Blue berets in the red

Slow payment by the UN has helped put out of business the company in New Zealand which supplies the organisation's distinctive blue berets.

Hills Headwear was put into receivership after a year of trading troubles made worse by the UN's tardiness, *The Dominion* newspaper said.

Bankers pulled the plug on the company, which supplies berets to Singapore, Japan and Saudi Arabia as well as the UN, after its debts reached \$550,000 (£343,000). The chief executive, Harry de Krey, said serious problems set in last year after a \$1.45m payment for 250,000 berets became overdue. AP - Wellington

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Jamaican PM romps home in poll to claim a third term

Jamaica's prime minister celebrated his party's unprecedented third straight election win with a pledge to end political violence. But while reggae music rang out at PJ Patterson's victory rally, gunshots filled the air elsewhere in the capital. Despite the fatal stabbing of a poll worker, five election-related shootings and accusations of fraud, Thursday's elections were Jamaica's most peaceful in decades.

AP - Kingston

Swede held hostage in Russia

An employee of the Swedish embassy in Moscow was taken hostage by a lone man believed to be armed and demanding a \$3m (£1.8m) by ransom. The embassy premises were cordoned off by dozens of Russian policemen, both armed and unarmed. The hostage is a trade representative of Sweden in Russia. The attacker, armed with a hand grenade, was holding him in his car, news reports said. They also quoted police as saying the attacker appeared to be mentally unstable and was "grabbing the grenade pin all the time."

Reuters - Moscow

Ex-king home for Christmas

Romania's former king arrived to spend his first Christmas in Romania since he was forced by the Communists to abdicate in 1947. King Michael, who lives now in Switzerland, came with his wife, Anne of Bourbon-Parme, and two of their daughters. She said the family intends to visit hospitals and orphanages, and meet President Emil Constantinescu, who declared himself a monarchist in the early 1990s, but has since changed his mind. Polls indicate that one in 10 Romanians favour a monarchy.

Reuters - Bucharest

Search for plane thwarted

Fog and snow stymied the search in northern Greece for a missing Ukrainian airliner again and rescuers said they were pinning their hopes on an American plane which can detect metal. The Russian-built Yakovlev 42, carrying 70 passengers and crew, vanished on Wednesday as it descended to the northern Greek airport of Salonika.

Reuters - Katerini

Grave wars of religion

Jewish and Muslim relatives of a man who had converted to Judaism and back to Islam attacked each other with sticks and stones at his funeral yesterday and several mourners were injured. The burial was to have been a compromise between the families, with Shuaikat Kuza to be buried in Haifa's Muslim cemetery but adjacent to the Jewish section and with rites from both religions. But disturbances broke out during the Muslim ceremony and police escorted Jewish family members away. Television footage showed screaming mourners and a man with blood running down his cheek. Kuza died of heart failure.

AP - Haifa

THE INDEPENDENT

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13/ THE LAST TSAR

Bones of contention over Nicholas's final resting place



Royal remains: Experts claim to have scientific proof, based on DNA testing, that bones found in a shallow grave near Yekaterinburg belonged to Nicholas II, Russia's last Tsar, pictured with his children



Photograph (left): Dimitri Belakov

Preparations have begun in St Petersburg to bury the remains of Russia's last emperor, Nicholas II, despite ferocious wrangling over the site of his final resting place. The site is kept locked but our Moscow correspondent, Phil Reeves, has been inside.

do end up here, as many expect – will become a shrine for Russian monarchists. It is a chapel, just inside the entrance to the traditional tomb of the tsars, the Peter and Paul Cathedral, which stands on an island in the River Neva at St Petersburg.

Visitors regularly come here to inspect the tombs of Peter the Great, Catherine II, and others, including Nicholas II's brother George, who was dug up in 1994 for tests to check the authenticity of the last tsar's bones.

They lie in the main cathedral itself, but this particular room has been kept away from prying eyes; its huge wooden double doors are usually locked.

"We are getting ready for the Romanov remains," said our official guide, Maya Lazutina, after we had persuaded a police officer to make an exception, and open the chapel doors. "Those people who think that they should be buried somewhere else simply don't know their history. St Petersburg has always been the city of the tsars, and it always will be."

The conviction that the remains should be, and will be, laid to rest here is strongly felt in Russia's former imperial capital, which still shoulders with resentment at the second-class status conferred on it by Communism. History is on their side: most of the tsars lie in the city.

And yet there is a chance that they may be disappointed. A tug-of-war is raging over the remains of Nicholas II, who was shot with his family by a Bolshevik firing squad in July 1918. St Petersburg faces competition from Moscow whose pugnacious mayor, Yuri Luzhkov, would like nothing better than to grab them for his newly reconstructed Cathedral

of Christ the Saviour on the banks of the Moscow River. The third bidder is Yekaterinburg, where the Romanovs were executed. It is also lobbying hard, through its regional governor, Eduard Rossel. Anxious to attract visitors to his grim industrial region, he wants the bones to be placed in a church at the spot where the Romanovs were shot, to be called the Church of the Spilt Blood.

After all, he argues, people should be buried where they die. Ever since they were recovered in 1991, the bones have been the subject of an intense debate over whether they are real and, if so, where they should be kept. After several years of tests – including DNA comparisons with samples from the Duke of Edinburgh, Nicholas's relative – the first issue appears settled.

A Russian government commission considering how and when to bury the Romanovs has declared itself certain that the remains are authentic. Despite this, it has decided to hold two months of further tests to sort and identify the parts. Only after that will it decide on recommendations for a burial place.

The final round of tests has exposed the inter-city wrangling over the bones in all its ug-

liness. Mr Rossel refused to allow some of the bones to be taken to labs in Moscow from Yekaterinburg, where they were being kept in a morgue, arguing that they were too fragile, and too easily stolen (one of Nicholas's vertebrae has already vanished).

This month he appeared to back down after Boris Yeltsin, the President, intervened, and allowed 150 bones to be sent to

the capital by special train. However, scientists in Moscow have – doubtless, to their fury – discovered that the bones they have been sent are not the emperor's. They are either those of one of his servants or unidentified remains.

St Petersburg is watching the debate with haughty distaste. "This issue is very unfortunate," said Ivan Artsishevski, head of the monarchist organ-

isation, the All-World Congress of Compatriots. "We are witnessing the Soviet habit of people thinking only of how they can benefit from the situation."

Complicating matters is the Orthodox Church which, despite Nicholas's dismal record, is considering making him a saint. Were this to happen, his bones would be deemed to have miraculous powers; tradition dictates that they go on display.

A shaft of pale winter light stretches through a window down on to a line of oblong concrete blocks inlaid into the floor. It illuminates the place which is now being prepared to receive the remains of Russia's last imperial ruler, burying a painful chunk of history.

The surrounding room, no bigger than a large sitting-room, is being decorated in a style that befits royalty and Orthodoxy. There are blues and golds, cherubs and deities, mouldings and murals. But there is nothing grand about the stark burial spot under the window.

There appear to be five blocks in all, each fitted with metal lifting rings. The body of the son and haemophiliac heir of Nicholas II, Alexei, was not found in the pit of acid-doused bones dug up in a forest outside the Ural city of Yekaterinburg. The remains of one of the tsar's daughters, probably Maria, are also missing. But the bones of Nicholas himself, his wife Alexandra and three daughters, Olga, Tatiana and Anastasia, were recovered. It appears plans are now underway to bury them here, side by side.

Few outsiders have been allowed to see this hushed place, which – if the Romanovs

THE INDEPENDENT

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Junketing councillors face surcharge over expenses

Doncaster councillors and officials who abused their expense allowances and accepted inappropriate gifts and hospitality could face surcharges if the authority does not recover the money from them, the District Auditor said yesterday. Fran Abrams has details of his hard-hitting report.

Four senior figures in Doncaster council were named yesterday as leading figures in the scandal. They are the council's deputy leader, Ray Stockhill; former leader, Peter Welsh; former chief executive, Doug Hale and former finance director John Smith.

Their seniority and the depth of their involvement justified their identification, he said. Mr Hale resigned after the irregularities were exposed by *The Independent*, while Mr Welsh and Mr Smith took early retirement.

The district auditor, Bill Butler, said: "In my opinion some members and some officers have failed to exercise proper judgement in accepting hospitality. The members and officers concerned should have been able to distinguish between what was acceptable and what was

not." Among the abuses were trips to the Trent Bridge Test, to the races and to a Euro '96 match at Hillsborough.

Members and officers also abused weaknesses in the system controlling expenses and foreign trips. Visits were made, often at club or business class fares, to Doncaster's twin towns in China, France, Poland and the United States. There were also trips to Tokyo, Nice, Kuala Lumpur, Genoa, Singapore, Brussels and Gothenburg.

In particular, Mr Welsh spent four days in Tokyo at a conference at a cost of £5,558. He then went on to meetings in Japan and Hong Kong. Another group paid £9,608 to fly to Wilmington, in the US, when the party would have paid only £3,161 if it had flown economy.

On a sample of 12 foreign trips involving 100 "person nights," £1,060 was spent on drinks from the hotel bar and mini-bars, plus £430 in phone calls and payments for videos and laundry. None was paid for out of a £30-per-day incidental expenses allowance.

An overnight stay in Manchester by one member and three officers ran up a hotel bill totalling £786, including a restaurant bill for £350, of which £139 was for drinks.

Council cars were used to take members and their families to pubs. One councillor used a car on 27 occasions, mostly with his wife, to go to

Sheffield. Mr Welsh and Mr Stockhill were also criticised for charging personal mobile phone bills to the authority.

Over 15 months Mr Welsh spent £772, £350 of which was in private calls to one number. Mr Stockhill made calls from abroad while on holiday without declaring them.

The report also criticised the council's involvement in Doncaster 2000 Ltd, a joint venture between itself and Keepmoat Holdings Plc, which was of "doubtful legality."

Steps should be taken to recover outstanding money taken in hospitality or gifts, or in unlawful or excessive benefits and expenses. Some money had already been repaid, Mr Butler said. However, if the council did not respond adequately he would consider sur-

charging the individuals concerned.

Alf Taylor, the council's acting chief executive said the authority would try to recover money owed to it by working with the district auditor and the police, who are still investigating the case. But he would not say how much money would be looked for. "It involves looking at reasonableness and whether there is any level of criminality, consequently we are working very closely with the police."

"Doncaster council, its officers and its members, have faced the closest scrutiny in its history, but through the work already carried out and the further issues raised which we will tackle in the future the authority is determined to ensure it follows and establishes best practice in local government," he said.

The Corn Exchange in Doncaster, where council leaders have been criticised over financial irregularities. Photograph: Steve Hall



Harrods

Sorry history of corruption in local government



John Poulson: Sixties symbol of corruption

Political corruption has been a recurring feature of local government. Alexandra Williams and Nathalie Dal Molin chart scandals from before the Second World War to the Westminster gerrymandering case in the headlines today.

The award of public contracts for gain, nepotism, or political favours by local party bosses has long been the hallmark of corrupt local authority politicians and officials, notably so in the Sixties heyday of the architect John Poulson and the Newcastle council leader T. Dan Smith. The evil of council profligacy flourishes in councils where the opposition is non-existent, or too weak to provide any kind of restraining force.

In spring 1985, Labour-run Liverpool council refused to set a legal budget. Derek Hutton, the deputy leader, was the key player in a game of brinkmanship against the Tory government. He was later charged with conspiring to defraud the council, but was acquitted. The prosecution alleged the council had been defrauded when licences were issued to John Monk, Mr Hutton's co-defendant, for use of two council-owned derelict sites as temporary car parks.

Councillors in Clay Cross, Derbyshire defied the Heath government in the 1970s, refusing to increase council house rents. The battle raged for two years. The rebels were heavily surcharged and declared bankrupt in 1975.

In September 1995, Labour councillors in Monklands, Lanarkshire, were suspended by

Tony Blair after they were criticised in a report for nepotism and overspending. There were claims that a Catholic mafia on the council had been giving jobs to relatives.

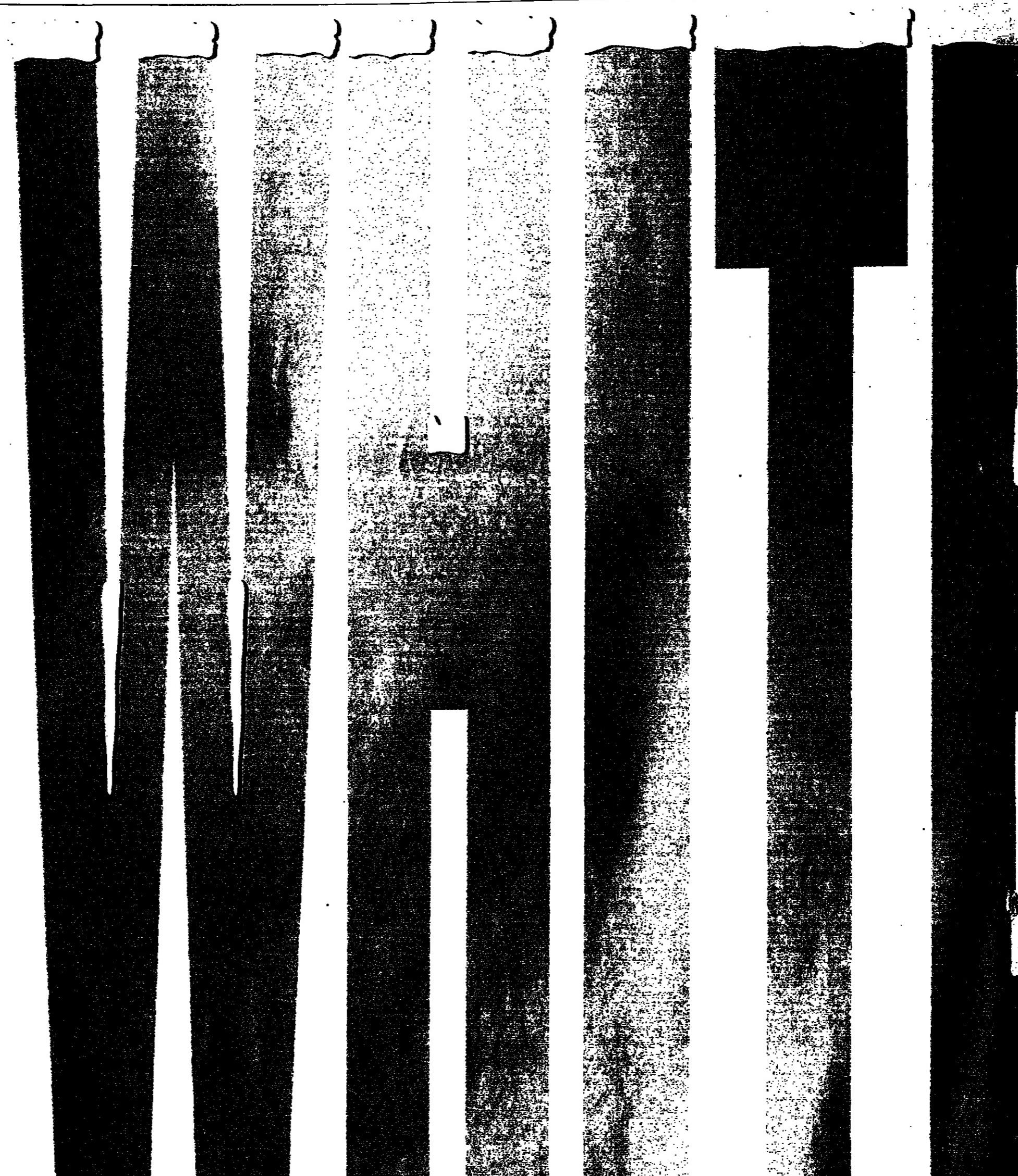
But few scandals have been as damaging as that revealed by an independent report in May 1995 into Islington council, in north London. An investigation found that policies favouring gays and ethnic minorities had helped paedophiles, pimps and drug dealers to victimise children in council care.

Allegations of racism have also led to sackings in councils such as Hackney and Tower Hamlets, which was accused of ethnically biased housing policies.

In April 1994, a report revealed the massive debts run up by big-spending councils. The 20 deepest in the red owed nearly £13bn between them. Manchester topped the debt-ridden table at £1.3bn, followed by Birmingham at £1.2bn.

Patrick Dunleavy, a professor of politics at the London School of Economics, said: "Nowadays there's not the large-scale systematic corruption of the 1960s because local authorities are not spending so much. It's fantastically easy to corrupt in a local authority without doing anything illegal by carrying out the kind of corruption that's impervious to legal inspection like triadic relationships. You have to be pretty stupid to be caught." The Porter case is a very specific feature of a rancorous political period in the London boroughs."

But homes-for-votes scandals have a long history. Before the last war, Labour's Herbert Morrison ran the London County Council and packed areas with sympathetic voters through his housing policy.



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15/AL FAYED ACCUSED

Harrods boss rejects charges of lechery and bugging



Intimidating time:
Francesca Betterman
(left), Harrods
former company
solicitor, claims her
ex-boss, Mohamed al
Fayed (right), entered
her bedroom while
she was on a business
trip to Paris.
Main photograph: PA



Former staff at Harrods have begun speaking publicly for the first time about what they allege is a terrifying regime of bugging, intimidation and sexual harassment under its owner Mohamed al Fayed. Steve Bogdon hears their stories.

"The whole thing was based on fear and intimidation," said Francesca Betterman, Harrods' former company solicitor. "Whenever he came to see me, he would have three of his bodyguards with him - ex-SAS or something - it was very frightening."

When she speaks, Mrs Betterman, 33, sounds exhausted. For months she has been drained of her experiences at Harrods. First, lawyers for *Vanity Fair* took affidavits from her to defend a libel action brought by Mr Fayed. Then, on Thursday, ITV's *The Big Story* featured her alleging how the Egyptian bugged her phone, and now everybody else is asking: "What was it like to work for Mohamed Fayed?"

Mrs Betterman was one of a string of former Harrods staff who told *The Big Story* the answer to the question. Aided by tapes secretly recorded by Harrods' security staff they told how their phones were bugged, how women were routinely sexually harassed by Mr Fayed and how everyone from the shop-

being shown a transcript of a telephone conversation he had had with a head-hunter on a phone in his Harrods-owned Park Lane apartment.

Last week, Mrs Betterman, who now lives in Germany, was presented with a tape that showed she too had been bugged.

The sexual allegations are more serious. "It was awful," Mrs Betterman said yesterday. "His [Mr Fayed's] language was very disgusting and very graphic. It might involve him asking you on Monday morning what you got up to over the weekend - but they were not his words. His would be revolting."

"He would get a bit gropey. There were two occasions when I was very frightened of him. Once was on a business trip to Paris when he came into my bedroom, and another was in London when I was told to go to Park Lane assuming it was business. But it wasn't and I had to talk my way out of his bedroom. He was not violent, but it was terrifying because his apartment was a maze of rooms and I couldn't find my way out."

Other women on *The Big Story* made similar claims. One, identified as Miss Y, said: "He made me come into his office and he started abusing me and holding me and saying if I had sex with him he would give me anything I wanted. He tried to kiss me on my mouth. I'm scared of him."

Another, Miss X, said: "He would come and grope me and make obscene remarks about my



floor to the boardroom lived constantly in fear of the sack.

Lawyers for Mr Fayed issued a statement yesterday describing the allegations as "untrue" and claiming they were made by disgruntled and vindictive former employees. Michael Rogers, legal director, said: "Mr Fayed has long been aware that his actions in exposing the corruption and sleaze which existed at the heart of the last Conservative government, and which were instrumental in its demise, would lead to a concerted and vicious attack on him by those most affected. That disgruntled former employees should lend themselves to this saddens him greatly."

However, asked to comment on specific allegations, lawyers for Mr Fayed refused to elaborate yesterday. The allegations against the Harrods boss came in two main tranches: one related to bugging, the other to sexual harassment.

The programme played tapes of telephone conversations recorded - entirely legally - on bugged telephones within the Harrods organisation. Robert Loftus, the former director of security at Harrods, confirmed yesterday that every bug was authorised personally by Mr Fayed, which he denies.

On several occasions, staff would be confronted with transcripts of telephone conversations they had had and asked to account for their comments. Mrs Betterman's husband, Christopher, former deputy chairman of Harrods, resigned after

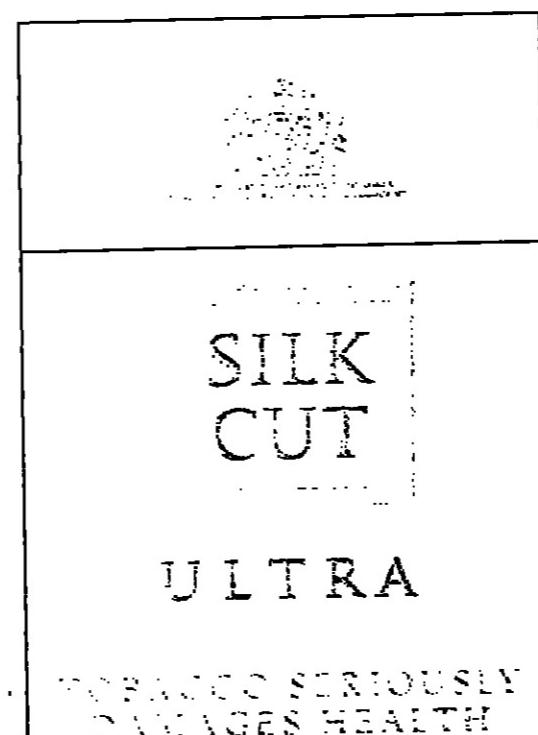
sexual life, my private parts." She alleged that, on another occasion, he tried to pay a bonus by pushing cash into her bra.

Many of the allegations are culled from an article in *Vanity Fair*, over which Mr Fayed was suing. However, the action was settled shortly after the death of his son, Dodi, and Diana, Princess of Wales. In the statement issued by his lawyers, it was pointed out that Mr Fayed felt he could not respond because other legal actions were pending.

A third set of allegations relate to the fear which Mr Fayed engendered among staff. Mrs Betterman and Mr Loftus told *The Independent* that it was not unusual for people to be dismissed during Mr Fayed's regular strolls through the store.

"His bodyguards would be with him and he would have them write people's names down," said Mrs Betterman. "Later, someone from personnel would tell them they were fired. It was disgusting; he was playing with people's lives. Sometimes it would be for something as simple as him not liking the look of someone."

Few, however, were prepared to answer back. One senior director said that Mr Fayed had a complement of more than 40 bodyguards. They were culled mainly from the ranks of the Royal Military Police close protection service - which defends generals, VIPs and ministers when abroad - with a smattering of SAS, paratroopers and Royal Marines.



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How music built a bridge over troubled waters

Luciano Pavarotti has lent his voice to bring the healing power of music to the children of Mostar. Susan Nickalls listened in...

Luciano Pavarotti has good reason to feel proud. When he opens the Pavarotti Music Centre in Mostar tomorrow he will have helped the charity War Child to create what few Western governments (or I-FOR or S-FOR) have come close to achieving in Bosnia - a multicultural project with the potential to help children from all sides of the conflict, overcome the traumas of war.

The £3.6m music centre is the largest post-war reconstruction project in Bosnia - Alija Izetbegovic, the Bosnian President, has called tomorrow's opening, which he plans to attend, the most important event to take place in his country for some time. And the funds to build it were raised almost entirely from the "Pavarotti and Friends" charity concerts (and subsequent recordings) which the tenor has organised in his home-town of Modena. Money is still coming in; the total figure is likely to be in the region of £3.5m. Fellow War Child patron Brian Eno and his wife Anthea Norman-Taylor also raised substantial contributions through "pop star" art and fashion auctions.

Commenting on his involvement, Pavarotti says he believes children are our most important resource. "For those young, unfortunate and innocent victims of the cruel fighting of adults, it is our duty to provide for the future of their communities. As musicians, we are proud that we have built for these beautiful

children a haven of peace, happiness and education where they and future generations can join together to make music."

During the war, Mostar was one of the most constantly bombarded cities in Bosnia, pounded first of all by the Serbs, then by the Croats, who almost reduced east Mostar to rubble and destroyed the famous, 400-year-old Stari Most bridge. It was against this backdrop that War Child set up a mobile bakery in east Mostar, keeping people alive with deliveries of fresh bread.

The charity's founders, filmmakers Bill Leeson and David Wilson, quickly realised that one of the main things young Bosnians were interested in was music. Before long, late-night informal chats were transformed by the London-based architect Nick Lacey into visionary plans for a large-scale music centre.

When I first visited Mostar in May 1995 with Leeson, Wilson, Brian Eno and the composer Nigel Osborne, professor of music in Edinburgh and now music director of the centre, the former Lukic primary school was just a shell. Barely an inch of the Austro-Hungarian facade had escaped the snipers' bullets; two sturdy marble staircases still stood, but the inside was knee-deep in rubble. Children showed us the basement where, despite the dark, the water and the rats, many had sheltered during the worst moments of the war.

As fast as Eno could unpack his boxes of exotic percussion instruments, the children snatched them up, banging cowbells and drums, shaking maracas and tambourines and singing at the tops of their voices. One of the most moving moments that day was hearing them perform an



Luciano Pavarotti and friends (from left) Brian Eno, Bono and The Edge, after a concert given in Modena in aid of the children of Bosnia. Photograph: Vincenzo Pinto/Reuters

impromptu piece inspired by the River Neretva - the aquamarine jewel that runs through Mostar - in that cold, gloomy basement. The space now houses a state-of-the-art recording studio, designed by Eno and Peter Gabriel's One World Studio.

The main focus of the music centre - which now boasts an open-air courtyard cum performance space, as well as an aromatic garden with tactile sculptures for the blind - will be the clinical music therapy programme set up by Nigel Osborne. For the past few years he has run an intensive

schools programme in Mostar and environs, preparing the way for in-depth work with individual children suffering from war trauma. Aided by Osborne's "Music in the Community" students from Edinburgh, young Bosnians from the Apeiron Arts Club are now running the workshops on their own. As Osborne says: "This project touches not just on Bosnian music, but music of the world, not just education but therapeutic education."

"It doesn't exist anywhere else, and these young Bosnian people are also simultaneously

regenerating their own culture." The centre will also house specialised music tuition for Mostar's primary and middle schools, as well as the pedagogical department of Sarajevo University. But it will be a focal point for many more activities: art therapy, publishing, photography, video/film-making, a DJ project, writing/drama, youth radio and complementary medicine. Already there have been violin masterclasses with students dancing to Boccherini, and music-mixing courses. The studio is already taking bookings: the British band

Doddy, who give several concerts in Mostar during the summer, are soon recording tracks for their new album there; Eno plans to work on some of his own music there after Christmas; and Siktar, Sarajevo's leading rock group, will record there next year.

When I spoke to Wilson earlier this week, the centre was already buzzing. "It's frenetic but very exciting. As I look out of my window, I can see children from the special school painting the wall of the aromatic garden and hear them making a cheerful noise. The kindergarten children

have also been in. We've been open three weeks and are now working round the clock to finish the painting and cleaning up."

But though the centre may now be officially open, Wilson is keen to stress the need for funds to run it over the next few years. "I'm confident we can fund the first year of operation, but it would be immoral to hand the centre over to the Bosnians in two years' time and not have any money in the bank."

He is full of praise for Pavarotti's fundraising efforts and certain the project would

never have happened without him. "We had some basic funding from the music business in Britain but never enough to achieve all this. The two concerts in Modena and the record sales were what made the big money."

Now that the Pavarotti Centre is finally a reality, it's time for the healing power of music to begin to work its magic. But, with Mostar still to all intents and purposes a divided city, War Child can only pray that the trickle of young people from the west to the east will soon turn into a flood.

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THE WEEK ON RADIO ROBERT HANKS

Laugh? They were almost civilised

Gandhi said, when asked about Western civilisation, that it would be a good idea. Presumably he was just being snippy about the West, but you could say the same thing about any civilisation. Once you're settled down and started tilling the fields, embracing monotheism and telling barbarian jokes, you can give it five days before somebody starts moaning about the good old days ("I miss when we used to be a horde") and celebrating the nobility and decency of uncivilised folk. But, however dull and oppressive it turns out in practice, civilisation always looks good on paper.

More to the point, it looks good on clay tablets, which is what Michael Diamond took as a starting-point for his 15-part history of *Civilisation* on the World Service last Sunday.

(No apologies for reviewing another World Service programme, even if most readers find reception difficult: the World Service deserves all the support we can give it.) Diamond placed the beginnings of civilisation in Mesopotamia 5,000 years ago, with the invention of cuneiform - wedge-shaped writing on clay - to assist the processes of Sumerian bureaucracy.

Civilisation is potentially a war-zone, and Diamond approaches it slowly and deliberately, with a factual presentation, refusing to get drawn into debates. In particular, he sidesteps defining what civilisation is. But his picture of ancient Mesopotamia identified some features that are, if not necessary to civilisation, certainly typical of it: cultivation of crops (irrigation), cities,

abstract nouns, charging interest on loans, literature.

Interestingly, money is not on the list. Compare and contrast Rob Long's *Conversations with My Agent*, read by Rob Morrow as last week's *Late Book* on Radio 4. The book is based on Long's experiences as a television scriptwriter in Los Angeles where money is more than a central feature, even in the way that a sunflower is a central feature of a Van Gogh. Money is the paint.

But Long's beef with Hollywood is not the commodification of creativity - though he has a fine riff on the way that the local argot reduces any project to "a piece of business".

Money, which washes around the place like water in a toilet, is abstracted in a way it never is in the real world, where scarcity makes it seem more

concrete. How much money you have bears no relation to your success: a sitcom Long has written faces cancellation, but he has his contract renewed at a vastly favourable rate.

This isn't quite a morality play, then, but a nervous, earthling view of a planet where terrestrial morality is out of place. Nor does Long try to draw it as a primitive, philistine society, which it clearly is not. During the filming of Long's sitcom, some dogs run riot, and the studio audience roars. Long's agent congratulates him: "But they're not laughing at what we want them to laugh at." Long points out: "They never are," says the agent. This is a good working definition of life: and a society that has achieved this depth and simplicity is surely civilised in the profoundest sense.

Who's been sitting in my concert hall?

Roald Dahl's Goldilocks'
has been turned into a
piece of music-theatre.
Raymond Monelle fears it
may all have gone over
the children's heads.

The Austrian composer Kurt Schwertsik obviously had a lot of fun writing his children's pantomime *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. More fun, perhaps, than the children in Thursday night's audience at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall, few of whom, presumably, would have recognised the clever parodies in his witty and sophisticated score: Chabrier's *Joyeuse marche*, Richard Strauss's *Don Juan*, Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* and *Symphony of Psalms*, and lots more.

In fact, it was hard to decide whom the piece was written for. It was commissioned on behalf of the Roald Dahl Foundation and based on a "Revolt-

Rhyme" by Dahl, adapted as some sort of a stage piece by Donald Sturrock. A rather fragile clue in the poem was seized upon to support a court-room drama: Baby Bear is accused of the attempted murder of Goldilocks after the episode in which she eats the porridge and breaks the chairs. The text is written in cod verse in the manner of a Christmas pantomime ("Maestro, if you please") is the cue for the orchestra to play) and the cast are all animals: three very credible bears, a lion judge and a crew of suffocatingly coy rabbits.

The director (Karen Howard) and designer (Caroline Grebbel) had organised an acting area behind the orchestra: actors mimed extracts from the "plot" and spoke their preposterous lines through body-mimes that made them sound like heavenly voices.

The children enjoyed, up to a point, the animal costumes, the corny jokes and the invitations

to participate - at one point the conductor HK Gruber, that great old trooper (former Vienna choirboy turned baritone *chansonnier* and composer of *Frankenstein!!!*), pretended to go to sleep, and we all had to shout "Wake up, Gruber" - but there were long stretches when nothing happened on stage, and everyone waited for the music to finish. This was in spite of the fact that the musical numbers often had titles implying movement: "Goldilocks' sweet dance", "Criminal bears' dance", "Smelly melodrama". Perhaps Goldilocks herself (Sophie Dahl, Roald Dahl's generously proportioned fashion-model granddaughter, here making her stage debut) might have been better cast as a dancer, and the whole thing done as a quasi-ballet.

Nevertheless, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, whose record is honourable in commissioning new works, delivered Schwertsik's Toytown marches and bustling dances

A cold coming

A cold coming

17/CHRISTMAS STORY

A
Cold
ComingA SHORT STORY
BY SARAH DUNANT

The phone cut into the night like a chain saw through glass. He moaned and lifted his head to check the clock. Sam. Again. Jesus. It felt like he'd only just got to sleep. Who was this bastard? On the sixth ring the answering machine took it. He heard Elicia's voice kick in, vowels all round and smooth like her plump English ass. "This is the residence of Joseph Rivera. Mr Rivera can not come to the phone right now. Leave a message after the beep. Alternatively you can fax him on...". The numbers spat out of her mouth like little ping-pong balls. The beep screeched and the phone went dead. Nothing. Just like the night before and the night before that.

Joseph Rivera was not a man who liked being woken in the night. He was old and rich enough to be used to having what he wanted and what he wanted was a good night's sleep. Whereas in the old days (the young days, that is) he could nap on the flip of a dime, now he needed two brands, a little white pill and Elicia's hands working over his shoulders and back (no lower though – she was boringly adamant about that) before he could shuffle off his daily coil. So, naturally enough, when he got to sleep he didn't like to be woken. Certainly not by some bastard who didn't leave a message.

Maybe it was some asshole from abroad who couldn't read the time difference. His ex-partner Benny had always been bad at that; funny, since it wasn't like Benny didn't know how to count, though the clock probably didn't have enough zeros for him. Still, it couldn't be Benny. Benny was under half a ton of Carrara marble in upstate New York, and even these new hipsy-dipsy portables didn't reach where Benny had gone. Sad though. The two of them had always had a lot to talk about: old times, old crimes. Just a shame Benny had taken to talking to the wrong people.

There had been a time when Joseph used to sleep with the phone in his hand. Business was booming, and when you had freight moving all over the world you needed to know when it got to where it was going, or more important, when it didn't. He'd have his ear to the receiver before it rang: adrenaline like a wake-up alarm in his blood. A truck weighing in at ten heavy at a customs point, a shipment hitting the rocks (literally) off the coast of Spain, a pregnant Indian woman who had her delivery in the Customs intensive care room at Terminal Four with a little help from Her British Majesty's friends. He'd heard it all in his time. No wonder he didn't like being woken in the night. It was never good news.

He shifted his bulk in the bed, but the damage was done. He hauled himself up and went downstairs to make a cup of coffee. He switched on the outside lights and the gardens lit up like a set for a Bing Crosby Christmas movie. The grass was covered in icing sugar frost right down to the lake and those cute stone statues that Number 3 had picked up on their Italian honeymoon had icicles hanging down from their domes. He knew how they felt. The kitchen was as cold as the inside of a meat freezer. These English bastards didn't know anything about weather. One bad winter and their trains started to fall off the tracks. Even the women were cold. He should have picked up and gone somewhere else when Erica left. This stately home crap was her idea anyway. He'd only stayed on to make her feel bad when all she got from the divorce settlement was the condo in Florida. Florida. At least it was warm. It couldn't have been her calling, could it?

Happy Christmas, you mean bastard: stay up, pay up. He wouldn't put it past her. Number 1 and Number 2 would never have done a thing like that. Marie was too loyal and Dana, well Dana was too stupid. Maybe it had been Carla. Hey, what if it was Carla? Australia was a lot of hours away and she probably got it a bit mixed up. Yeah, it was Carla, ringing for a little Christmas peace. Or a little Christmas present. Forget it. What's the use of a daughter who doesn't love her Daddy. If she liked her mother enough to live with her, she could live off her too. No. It wasn't Carla.

But if it wasn't work and it wasn't family then who was it? Three times in three days. No voice, no message. Just the call. Ten years ago he would have had six men out back every night just in case. But ten years ago he had something to protect, a business, something other people wanted. Now it was all just profit in the bank, figures on a bit of paper in some up-town accountants office. No juice any more. No fun.

Problem is, with Benny gone I don't have enough enemies any more, he thought. I don't have enough friends either. Maybe he should marry again. Fourth time lucky: some ripe little peach with a cocktail of cherry and silicone running through her tits. Make an old man happy. He'd make it worth her while.

He picked up the phone and listened to the dialling tone. He thought of calling Carla himself, just to say, Ha, how you doing out there? Frying up I guess? How're the



kids? How many of them are there? Like a real grandfather. Naw. Forget it.

The phone had been off the hook so long, the dialling tone went dead.

Elicia let herself in with her key at twelve o'clock, all bright and Christmas breezy. "You know I can only stay a few hours today, Mr Rivera. It's Christmas Eve."

"I don't give a fuck if it's Judgement Day. Who wants your wages?"

"You do, Mr Rivera, but it's not enough to make me work Christmas or listen to tangos like that, thank you."

Elicia was like the school teacher he'd had in fifth grade. All upright and outrage on the outside, rolling hot lava underneath. Or at least that had been his fantasy. Then and now. She stripped off her coat to show a curvy little red suit with white trimmings, just like Santa, but with the bulges in the right places. Yep, just like fifth grade. If he was lucky he might get a feel when he leaned back into her massage fingers later, but it wouldn't go any further than that. Elicia had made that quite clear from the beginning, in a teasing kind of way. If he was honest, most of the time he wasn't that bothered. Jeez, he really was getting old.

"What about the housekeeper?"

She clicked her tongue. "Mr Rivera, I told you. I rang three agencies yesterday. They can't do anyone till the New Year. If you've been a little nicer to the last one..."

"The last one was a —"

"That's as may be, but she was also the fifth this year. You better accept you're not going to have anyone by Christmas. Do I gather you didn't sleep well?"

"The phone rang again," he said petulantly. "Five o'clock?"

"Yep."

"Did you check the fax?"

"No I didn't 'check the fax,'" he said, mimicking the sounds made by her little goldfish mouth. "If they wanted to send a fax, they would have got the damned number by now."

"Not necessarily. It could have been a fax-to-fax call. That's automatic."

"Well, if that's what it is, I want it stopped."

"Have you dialled 1471?"

"What?"

"1471. It tells you who sent the last call."

Does it indeed? There had been times in his life when that would have been one hell of a useful device. She walked over to the phone, her body plump and overflowing like youth itself. She dialled and listened. Then frowned and shook her head.

"Nothing. Maybe it was international."

"International?"

"Or maybe it was Santa Claus asking what you want for Christmas." And she giggled.

He thought about saying "you", but he felt too tired.

"If it happens again I'll get the operator to screen the incoming calls."

"Yeah, that will do it." He paused.

"Thank you."

His politeness registered. She put her head to one side. "What are you doing for Christmas, Mr Rivera? Will that friend of yours – what's his name, Benny – will he be dropping by?"

No. no. Benny won't be coming. He's er ... a little weighed down this year. How about you? You spending the day with that husband of yours?"

"Yes. Benny's been working very hard lately. I'm going to do him a really good Christmas. Trimmings and all."

God, what a waste he thought. A body like hers with the mind of a housewife. How about a Christmas favour for old Joseph, eh? I'll make it worth your while. The cheque's already in the drawer. But he knew better than to ask.

She took a few letters, checked a few share prices for him, and made an appointment with his accountant for the new year. As far as she was concerned Joseph Rivera was a successful Italian-American businessman who had retired to England because he liked the climate. If the DEA had ever knocked on her door and asked her about Tony Corri, she wouldn't have known the name or recognised the photo. New man, new face, new passport. It was so long ago now that Joseph hardly remembered him himself.

She left at 4pm on the dot, taking the envelope with a smile and a thank you.

"Don't I get a Christmas massage in return?"

"Oh, not today. Mr Rivera. It's only the afternoon. Anyway you wouldn't want to fall asleep too soon. You might miss Father Christmas."

"How about you do his job for him, this year, eh, Elicia?" He said in a low growl, which hurt his throat in a way it didn't use to.

"Oh, I couldn't do that," she said brightly, pulling on her gloves and wiggle her fingers into the little holes. "I'd never get back in time to put the turkey in." But at the door she turned and took pity on him. "If you're on your own why don't you go down to church for the evening carol service. They light it all with candles. It looks lovely."

The Church? Yeah, why not? It's been thirty-nine years since my last confession, father and ..." He'd be lucky to get on his knees before the lightning hit him.

He poured himself a large brandy and sat by the French windows watching the day die. The dark fell thicker than usual. As he picked up the glass in his hand he trembled slightly. How come he felt so bad? What if someone was trying to scare him? Out there in the shrubbery with a portable phone watching him through the window as he struggled to get up? Had Benny talked to anyone before he died? That wasn't what the message had said, but people don't always tell you the truth, especially when you pay them for the lie. Well, if this was an old score, so be it. Christmas was the time to settle it: a lot of spirit of past and present around tonight.

The thought acted like a shot of adrenaline. Yeah, he missed the work. It had been his life. Drugs. He'd been selling them on the streets before the streets even wanted them. In the Sixties he'd made a fortune watching his product go up in smoke, but had been smart enough to get out quickly, move to the drugs where you could rely on the curve between dependency and profit. Grass should never have been illegal anyway. It was just a matter of time till it went legit. Only a couple of weeks ago he'd heard some English broad from a fancy newspaper launching a campaign. Legalising cannabis will hurt no one, she'd said. Maybe it won't hurt you, lady, but it'll put a lot of dishonest folk out of a job, he had replied, laughing at the radio.

He poured himself another brandy and dug around for something to eat. He defrosted a hunk of steak from the freezer and threw it in a pan. The fat spat the word cholesterol round the kitchen. He liked the sound it made.

You should be careful, Mr Rivera. Your heart is not in good shape."

I could have told you that, buddy. Been broken by too many divorce settlements. "So give me the good news, doc?"

"Your lungs on the other hand are tip top."

"Yep." He nodded. "Never touch drugs. That's my advice."

He ate at the kitchen table as the snow came in, great wild feathers of it, silent and still. It would be hot in Australia. He picked up the phone and got directory enquiries. Adelaide was all he remembered, but against the odds he got a number.

It rang eight times. A sleepy voice answered.

"Hi. Is Carla there?"

"Carla? What ... no."

"Where is she? She does live there?"

"Yeah. But she's away at the reef with the kids. Till New Year."

"Kids? How many kids?"

"Three. Hey, who is this?"

"Wouldn't you like to know."

"Listen, do you know what time it is here?"

"Yeah" he said gleefully. "Five am. Tell her her father called. And say that I'm sending something in the post."

He slammed down the phone and wrote a cheque with a number of zeros. Who loves ya baby? He put it in an envelope. Then he remembered that he didn't have her address. He tore it up again.

A couple of hours later he went to bed. This time he turned off the answering machine and took the phone with him.

along with the brandy bottle and two sleeping pills.

When the call came it took a long time to rouse him. Eventually he woke up through a fog and – when he realised what it was – grabbed the phone, his heart pounding.

"Who is it?"

The silence at the other end of the line was deep and empty, like space.

"Come on, you bastard. Haven't you got the guts to talk to me?"

When it finally came, the voice was soft and thin, masculine and feminine at the same time.

"Joseph, or can I call you Tony? You're in, at last. We've been trying to get in touch with you for days."

"Who is this?"

"Benny's told us so much about you."

"Benny?"

"Yes. Of course we knew a lot anyway. But we'd love you to come in and talk to us. Make a clean slate of it. Get it off your chest."

"Who are you?"

"Don't worry. The judgement will be completely legit."

"Who is this?" he roared. And the line went dead.

He felt a sudden screaming pain in the centre of his body, like someone put his balls where his heart was meant to be and was squeezing them in a nut cracker.

Jesus ...

Some hours later, up above, the night supervisor (short staffed as Christmas was a busy season) was checking the records.

"Hey – it says here Tony Corri died tonight. Christian, these are your initials?"

"Yes."

"But Corri wasn't due to go till '98."

"Oh. Well, I ... er ... I saw the memo about needing to get a better balance between good and evil. And I thought –"

"You thought nothing. Corri wasn't due. He had stuff to do yet."

"But the man was a disaster: drug running, wife beating. Only this year he had his ex-partner killed to keep him quiet."

"Nevertheless, he was due for a reconciliation with his daughter."

"You could have fooled me. I just watched him tear up a cheque to her."

"Christian, how many times do I have to tell you, not everything is about money. The guy wasn't due."

"OK. I'm sorry. What do we do?"

"You better get him back there."

"Too late. The heating's off. The body's as stiff as a corpse ... oops sorry."

"Then you better start him off again."

"What? A whole new one?"

"You know the rules. They go too soon they get another go at it."

"I don't think –"

"You want me to take this higher?"

"No, no. OK. OK."

In the semi down the road on the estate. Elicia had woken early to give her husband a first Christmas present.

"God, Licia, you're lovely," he murmured, pausing for breath. "I don't want you working for that old Scrooge, no more, you hear? From now on I want you all to myself."

She laughed. "Oh, he's not so bad. That Christmas bonus was quite generous."

But Frank's mind was already distracted again. They sang in unison for a few moments, and as he stopped she thought she felt something flicker deep inside her. Now wouldn't that be the best Christmas present she could give him this year?

If it was a boy they'd call it Tony. She'd always liked that name.

Sarah Dunant's latest novel is 'Transgressions', published by Virago.

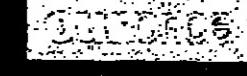
Wisebuys.

Follow the star to Our Price
and find Muhammad Ali 'When We Were Kings'.



The true story of
the rumble in the jungle.

TRACK IT DOWN AT



Green salad, home-made brandy and a large pinch of salt



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A plate of grass drizzled with olive oil for Christmas lunch? A little of what you don't fancy does you good. As we report today, Albanians are terribly healthy considering their poverty. If they survive childbirth – a hazardous business, given the state of the Albanian health services – their life expectancy is about the same as ours. Yet their annual income is about £250 a head, compared with more than £12,000 for the UK.

Apparently, because most Albanians cannot afford meat, they eat (when they can) fresh fruit and vegetables, bread and olive oil. One of our staff reports a visit four years ago, soon after the fall of the Communist regime, when all food was scarce. Under the chandeliers in the marble dining-room of Tirana's only luxury hotel, the Italian-built Hotel Dajti, he studied the extensive menu, only to be told that everything on it was off. The only food available was "salad", which turned out to be a plate of what looked like grass, albeit of a relatively broad-leaved variety.

There is a Scrooge-like sappiness in *The Lancer*'s choice to publish its findings at this time of excess consumption in the rich parts of Europe, complete with maps showing the distribution of olive production and mortality, showing a clear negative correlation between the two. We already knew Mediterranean food was

healthy; is now the best time to remind us?

Fortunately, we can take some of *The Lancer*'s findings if not with a pinch of salt, at least with a glass of wine. We do not have to surrender everything to the miserabilism of the medical profession. Others of our correspondents vigorously contest some of the report's assertions. *The Lancer* argued that alcohol consumption in Albania is "the lowest in Europe" and that "prevalence of smoking is very low in the whole country". Our man in Tirana snorts in disbelief. He recalls staying with an Albanian family and being served home-brewed grappa in an old, recorked bottle. For breakfast. And consumption of large quantities of Skanderbeg brandy is a matter of national pride. This foul-smelling concoction is named after a 15th-century Albanian leader who stood up to the Ottoman Empire, and is made drinkable only by being taken with tobacco.

The drinking at least fits in with the advice we reported yesterday from Sir Richard Doll, who is emerging as the adult equivalent of the nation's Santa Claus. With all the authority of the man who first demonstrated the link between smoking and lung cancer, he tells us two or three alcoholic drinks a day are good for our health. That plus the Delaification of Mediterranean fare, should make the strictures of



the food police more palatable. Ms Smith has popularised chargrilled vegetables, stopped us swearing at rocket and told us how to use olive oil.

But the *Lancer* report raises other important issues. It is one of the responsibilities of government to let us know that

good for us and that too many meat and milk products, and total calories, are bad. But that does not mean they should go around banning things.

Ban on the bone has been banned on the basis of a 5 per cent risk that there may be one extra CJD infection in the UK next year. Assuming half the population might otherwise have eaten bony beef, an individual may face an additional 1 in 600 million risk of contracting CJD. Compared to the risk of contracting, say, lung cancer from unburned cigarettes, the decision to ban beef on the bone was extraordinary.

(In passing, however, we are compelled to comment on the disgraceful opportunism of William Hague in staging his stunt this week, buying an illegally-sold T-bone steak at Smithfield. We remember the hysterical moral tone of Conservative lectures directed at Labour MPs in the Eighties, sanctimoniously reminding poll-tax refuseniks of their duties as legislators to uphold the law, no matter how much they disagreed with it.)

Broadly speaking, it is the approach to tobacco which right health warnings, not bans. Cigarette packets are plastered with ever starker and more unambiguous counsels of doom. Food labelling has a long way to go to catch up; but rather than banning beef, why not label it? "The Gov-

ernment's Chief Health Officer says: They don't eat this stuff in Albania." That sort of thing. But let people choose.

The other intriguing thought provoked by the Albanian findings is: how come, if healthy food can be so cheap, "health food" is so expensive? There is something very strange about the fact that, in rich countries, poor people tend to eat less healthy food than rich people, whereas in Albania, where nearly everyone is poor, people eat healthier food than in rich countries.

We know about the diseases of affluence. We know, although we hardly care to think about it, about the "acceptable" level of death on our roads. After diet, one of the most important explanations of Albanian longevity is the lack of motor vehicle traffic.

As *The Lancer* authors speculate, Albania may hold some clues for us as to how to combine health and wealth. Leave the car at home. No mince pies. No brandy butter (except possibly made with Skanderbeg). And Delta Smith's *Summer Collection* instead of tasteless, mass-produced turkey. What they do not say, however, is that the Albanians may live for a long time, but their diet does not make them smarter. They still sell for that pyramid-selling scam, didn't they?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Free information

Sir: Stephen Dorrell (letter, 17 December) suggests the Campaign for Freedom of Information has been naive for allegedly suggesting that a Freedom of Information (FOI) Act would have prevented the arms for Iraq scandal – something we have not in fact claimed. But a decent Act should have provided access to documents indicating the crucial change in policy on arms sales to Iraq. Scott reported that the "overriding" reason for concealing the change was "a fear of strong public opposition" to greater defence sales to Iraq. These are not valid grounds for withholding information under an FOI Act.

Nor do I believe we have been naive in welcoming the Government's freedom of information proposals. They will not cover the security services or the non-administrative functions of the police – significant omissions, which should be challenged. However, Mr Dorrell is mistaken in suggesting that defence and foreign affairs are also to be excluded.

The range of bodies covered by the Act – which includes local government, hundreds of quangos and even the privatised utilities – is greater than under any other country's FOI law. The right of access will extend to old files awaiting release in the Public Record Office. The proposed commissioner will have the power of a court to compel government to release information: a citizen-friendly, effective enforcement mechanism. Many of the proposed exemptions will permit information to be withheld only if disclosure would cause "substantial damage", a tougher test than the plain "damage" required under the American act.

Of course there may be pressure to weaken the legislation, by changes or other means. But these are bolder proposals than we, and I suspect most others, expected to see, and promise significant improvements to the individual's rights and the accountability of the state.

MAURICE FRANKEL
Director
The Campaign for Freedom of Information
London EC1

Sir: Article 19 agrees with Stephen Dorrell (letter, 17 December) that the wholesale exemption of government bodies is a key weakness in the Government's proposals for a Freedom of Information Act.

Mr Dorrell asks what "national security" actually means. In the White Paper, it is a conveniently amorphous area.

The Government must clearly and firmly define in the new law what they deem to be national security – for example, protecting territorial integrity against the use or threat of force – and therefore which specific categories of information will be outside the scope of the Act.

MALCOLM SMART
Deputy Director
Article 19 International Centre
Against Censorship
London N1



President Mandela: it's not paranoia – they really were persecuting him

Photograph: Tom Pilston

Mandela's burden

Sir: In your editorials, and still more in your news reports, would you please stop referring to Nelson Mandela's "paranoia" (18 December)? An evidence to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has clearly shown, in the past some exceedingly unpleasant things happened, which included infiltration of the ANC by people acting on behalf of their white political opponents, some of

whom did not mind torturing and killing black people. One does not need to be a comrade or a psychiatric patient to believe that some of these malign influences might still be around.

At a completely different level, it is profoundly disappointing that some of the big corporations, in their evidence to the commission, did not seem to appreciate their role in supporting the previous regime.

Moreover, despite some positive initiatives, the attitude

of so many white people and the companies they run suggests that they fall short of wholehearted support for change. One gets the impression that they feel that if you employ a few black chaps, to show will-

ing, then that is enough. They do not seem to appreciate that economic growth, political stability, and freedom from crime all require a more substantial change of attitude and behaviour on the part of individuals and corporations. Difficult af-

ter all these years, of course, but essential.

Finally, you refer to the Stalinist length of Mandela's speech. After all that he has done for South Africa over the years I do not begrudge him the chance to talk to his own supporters in his final speech to them. It is worth remembering that the Pope used to spend a similar time talking to his flock.

PAUL TWYMAN

Birchington, Kent

Buying a pension

Sir: John Chapman ("The ghost of scandals past", 13 December) asks what his table of ratings for personal pension plans tells us. The answer is: nothing much.

By assuming that all plans have exactly the same rate of growth, he isn't, as he claims, comparing returns at various stages in the life of a pension. All he is doing is comparing charges.

This is like choosing a car not on size, comfort, economy or performance, but purely on price. If you want a Mini-sized pension, then by all means go for the lowest price you can find.

But our market research has consistently shown that people care most about the financial security of their pension provider, followed by good, consistent medium-to-long-term financial performance and the ability to offer reliable financial advice. Price comes a long way down the list.

He also rather misses the point in his criticism of transfer and paid-up values. Provided they have been well advised, everyone taking out a pension

plan will know that they are making a long-term commitment which gives the best value when maintained to maturity.

Many people who do stop contributing to a plan don't have any choice in the matter. Many will have changed jobs and been forced to give up their personal pension for an occupational scheme, because employers who already run occupational pension schemes can refuse to pay into a personal scheme. A change in the law to make personal pensions truly portable by requiring employers to pay in a fair amount would instantly cut the number of people having to take transfers or paid-up values.

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Post letters to Letters to the Editor
and include a daytime telephone number.
Fax 0171 293 2056; e-mail: letters@independent.co.uk
E-mail correspondents are asked to give a postal address.
Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

sweet corn this year – the entire crop has been eaten by the badgers. They also scratch in the soil for earthworms, and dig holes into which they defecate. In a newly prepared seedbed or in the middle of young plants, the damage is very disheartening to a gardener.

This is not the worst of it. One of our plotholders has just been instructed by leisure services that he must vacate his plot, which he has cherished over a number of years, because badgers have dug a set beneath his neighbour's plot. His neighbouring plotholder must lose a quarter of her plot. This is clearly not good, and I cannot think of anything better calculated to inflame opinion against badgers.

Can anyone suggest a solution which is lawful, and fair both to badgers and gardeners?

JEREMY SMITH
Chairman, Walnut Tree
Meadow Allotment Society
Richmond, Surrey

What the English mean by the Green issue is a bulldozer arriving at the end of the lane – William Waldegrave

A slag heap is a high mound of waste material which accumulates over many years. The arts in Britain are full of them – Melvyn Bragg

The belief in a more equal society is a philosophy which will come back into fashion one day – Lord Hattersley

Such vulgar, awful questions – Lord Archer, asked how much his new Andy Warhol lithographs cost him

All of us experienced ghoulish pleasure as we heard Harriet Harman being subjected to this terrifying procedure – Michael Portillo, discussing Labour's attack on the way she was interviewed by John Humphrys on Radio 4

This harping on about security and provision for one's old age fills me with dread and horror. It's a deadener of the human spirit. I have absolutely no intention of retiring and will go out with all guns blazing – Brian Blessed, actor

Just as his honeymoon is about to end, mine is about to begin – William Hague, who gets married on Friday of the Prime Minister

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Asylum lunacy

Sir: I share your correspondents' despair over asylum seekers (letter, 15 December). Fortress Europe at any cost seems to be the current government policy.

If any other department took as long as the Immigration and Nationality Department to make a decision there would be an uproar in Parliament. Policies and procedures are made and changed so frequently as to leave practitioners bewildered. Stories are fed to the tabloid press of "bogus" asylum seekers.

The credibility of applicants is judged using Western standards without due regard to custom, intellect, personality, or linguistic nuances. This results in absurd decisions being made where one member of the family is recognised as a refugee while the other is refused, both on the same facts.

The appeals system is in shambles, with special adjudicators issuing directions and changing procedures at an alarming rate.

If the Government fails to act the High Court will be inundated with judicial reviews. S OSMAN
Scudamore Osman, Solicitors
London W6

Snub to an ally

Sir: Once again Turkey has been pushed to the sidelines as the European Union decides who are the favoured countries in the queue for membership ("EU snub provokes Turkey to hit back", 15 December).

Turkey has been a solid and reliable member of Nato for many years, consistently supporting the European and Western stance on numerous issues. Yet, when it looks to Europe for its economic future it receives consistently negative responses. Turkey may not yet measure up to what we believe a European Union member looks like, but they have been there for Europe when they were needed.

The European Union should give Turkey a list of requirements for membership and a timetable in which to achieve them and then accept it as a member when those requirements have been met. If not, we may witness the departure of a valuable ally to another camp.

STEPHEN COX
Accrington, Lancashire

the most successful hacks, such as Richard Littlejohn, who was reported this week to be moving from the *Daily Mail* to *The Sun* for £800,000 a year, are those whose views most closely resemble those of the caricature, rabidly right-wing taxi-driver.

Much gentle amusement in the office over some of the details of Andrea Whittam Smith's new job as Britain's film censor. Our founder and current columnist, a self-confessed squeamish man, tells us he will, for instance, have to distinguish between different degrees of bondage – light, heavy, intermediate and so on. But what exactly is light bondage? Presumably it involves quantities of Sellotape and Blu-Tack.

Speaking of bondage, there has been much comment on Stephen Spielberg's stalker. The film genius has been stalked by a gay sadomasochist who has been lurking around his Hollywood home with a bag containing handcuffs, ducting tape and nipple clamps, having bought an electric shock gun and other equipment as part of his plan to abduct Spielberg and do unspeakable things to him. This must be unsettling.

As it happens, I too have a stalker. Everywhere I go, particularly during the party season, he has left little messages, passed on rumours, about how he plans to abduct me from Canary Wharf and do unspeakable things to this newspaper. The man speaks with a Scottish accent and is said to carry a bag containing promissory notes from two tycoons, plus – so I am told – editorial shackles, slightly soiled Eighties fetish gear of an ideological nature and various financial levers only obtainable on specialist premises. Oh, and the nipple clamps, of course. So if anyone comes across this Mr Andrew Neil, I trust they will report him to the proper authorities.

Andrew Marr

QUOTE UNQUOTE

What the English mean by the Green issue is a bulldozer arriving at the end of the lane – William Waldegrave

A slag heap is a high mound of waste material which accumulates over many years. The arts in Britain are full of them – Melvyn Bragg

The belief in a more equal society is a philosophy which will come back into fashion one day – Lord Hattersley

Such vulgar, awful questions – Lord Archer, asked how much his new Andy Warhol lithographs cost him

All of us experienced ghoulish pleasure as we heard Harriet Harman being subjected to this terrifying procedure – Michael Portillo, discussing Labour's attack on the way she was interviewed by John Humphrys on Radio 4

This harping on about security and provision for one's old age fills me with dread and horror. It's a deadener of the human spirit. I have absolutely no intention of retiring and will go out with all guns blazing – Brian Blessed, actor

Just as his honeymoon is about to end, mine is about to begin – William Hague, who gets married on Friday of the Prime Minister

19/COMMENT

Cyberpetting to teach young women the facts of life



DAVID AARONOVITCH
THE VIRTUAL BOYFRIEND

I am a dad with three young daughters. When they are older I don't want them having anything to do with boys; I was once a boy, and I know what they are like.

So I was happy to read Glenda Cooper's report in this newspaper yesterday, concerning the "Princess Club Pocket 2: Operation Boyfriend Makeover". This is a £19 computer game, aimed at adolescent girls, in which - Tamagotchi style - you are favoured with a virtual boyfriend. In 12 computer months by guiding him in his speech and behaviour, you can transform him into a great-looking, sensitive and high-earning bloke. Or your neglect can leave him shooting pool with his fellow delinquent bikers in Joe's No-Hope Saloon.

At best such a game could take my girls' minds off boys for a good long time - until I and their mother had the chance to choose someone suitable for them. But, at worst, the Tamagotchi of the future could just help them (were it realistic) to deal with some of the problems they will certainly have to face.

Nothing, of course, will entirely prepare them for the social and linguistic poverty of teenage boys. They can take their virtual Romeos to the pictures, or buy them novels, or talk to them of feelings, and - if it is accurate - the computer will register no impression whatsoever. Instead it will show you a football match which you cannot stop, leavened only with *Beavis and Butt-head* at half-time for light relief.

Having ignored you for a week or so, the computer will next want to shove its joystick in your ear. When you resist, it will display the following messages, "Jade does it with St John", or "You would if you loved me", or finally, if you weaken at all, the classic, "I promise I'll only put it in a little bit of the way". You may suggest a condom, in which case the screen will show you a disgusted Smiley and the blinking legend, "It's like a taking a bath in a Wellington boot". If you are persuaded to succumb entirely, after a minute or so the screen will

explode into gorgeous colours, then switch itself off for an hour and, finally, light up again only to ask, "How was it?" If you do not enter the correct response, then the game is over.

Curiously, the virtual boyfriend has its serious critics. A senior lecturer in psychology at one of the Midlands universities, Dr Mark Griffiths, was quoted yesterday as saying that he wasn't sure all this was healthy. "How do people then cope with the real world?" he asked, then added, more controversially, "Virtual relationships do not work like real relationships. By producing the ideal date you're conditioning someone as you go along, turning them into someone you want them to be."

Let me deal with healthiness quickly and say that it all depends. If, as many young Japanese men seem to do, you spend much of your free time in a plastic and metal sleep-tube, with only the porno channel for company, a virtual reality mate represents a serious attempt at forging an adult association. They should be supplied free by caring employers.

But Dr Griffiths' second point is more confusing. Let us recall it. "By producing the ideal date," he said, "you're ... turning them into someone you want them to be." Well, when has it ever been any different? In that sense male/female relationships have always been virtual. Girls almost invariably think that they can mould and improve boys. If they didn't believe that, then most of them would give up men altogether and become lesbians, or gardeners - or run donkey sanctuaries.

By and large, provided they put up with the joystick bit and service the creature's immediate physical needs, most of them will succeed to some extent. Men are indeed civilised by women. You only have to look at what happens to those heterosexual young men who do not live with women, to know what the dreadful alternative looks like. That's what *Lord of the Flies* was really about.

In fact, if only the male Tamagotchi could read maps and earn money, it might easily replace the real thing. No, I mean it. For what proves that the virtual and the real are very similar, is what happens later on in the relationship. I am talking, of course, about children. One minute, Tamagotchi, she is pressing your buttons, worrying about your colds, cleaning up after you, even suggesting that you put the joystick in her ear.

And the next minute, all that is past, for ever. Now she has the Tamagotchi to end them all. One that really does die if you don't feed it, and really does get ill if you don't immunise it, and really does behave better if you treat it properly, and really might become a biker or a nance. It's squidgey and warm, instead of being plastic and cold, and its smile is somehow more affecting. The old toy is forgotten.

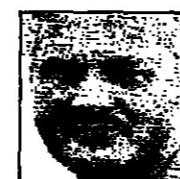
And this is the moment when men - if it is going to happen to them at all - also go from being virtual, and get real. No longer entitled simply to keep for what they want, they grow up.

But before we get carried away with new manliness, let us remind ourselves of what yesterday's article didn't mention - the Virtual Girlfriend. In Japan, the Virtual Girlfriend, apparently, turns into a doctor if you do the right things. If, however, you treat her indifferently, she becomes a hooker. Well, that may attract Japanese boys. But in Britain, one fears, it would have to be the other way round. Otherwise the game would simply be left on the shelf, until it was ready.

Having ignored you for a week or so,

the computer will next want to shove its joystick in your ear. When you resist, it will display the following messages, "Jade does it with St John", or "You would if you loved me", or finally, if you weaken at all, the classic, "I promise I'll only put it in a little bit of the way". You may suggest a condom, in which case the screen will show you a disgusted Smiley and the blinking legend, "It's like a taking a bath in a Wellington boot". If you are persuaded to succumb entirely, after a minute or so the screen will

Away from the manger: what's left when the nativity play is over?



PAUL VALLEY
RELIGION AT CHRISTMAS

It is Christmastide, and time for the nation's annual dose of vestigial religion. There will be choirboys, candles and carol services, but for most people little more than that. Britain, it is popularly said, is not really a Christian country any more. People of other faiths now make up the population, and the indigenous majority has slipped into a world view which celebrates consumerism, the freedom of the individual and a blind faith in science.

Not much room for religion there, despite the sentimental attachment to its relics in the school nativity play and a Santa Claus with his roots in a fourth-century saint from Asia Minor.

Who should complain? After all, as a latter-day Monty Python team of atheist might ask, what has religion ever done for us? It is the sponsor which has brought you this year alone, a host of atrocities, outrages and indignities. There is the Taliban in Afghanistan, the closest Saudi legal system and the murder of tourists by self-styled Islamic warriors in Egypt. In Africa, Christian fundamentalists kidnap children to turn them into soldiers and sex slaves. In Sri Lanka war continues between Buddhists and Hindus. At home religious differences undergird tensions in Northern Ireland, as they do between Muslim and Sikh gangs in Slough.

All serves to draw the opprobrium of right-thinking secularists. Within these pages Polly Toynbee has recently written in praise of Islamophobia and religio-phobia in general. Even Robert Fisk - no knee-jerk secular fundamentalist - has wondered recently, after 20 years of resisting such a conclusion, whether the evils perpetrated in the name of religion might be intrinsic to those faiths themselves.

And yet religion persists. We hear of fashionable converts to Catholicism, and of a revival of Islam among young British Muslims. Those who find mainstream faiths inadequate turn to house churches or the odd rituals of the New Age, or invent their own, as people did in vast numbers after the death of Diana. Is it just an irrational quest? To believe in something is to believe in God. Creation was not a moment in the past, it is a continuing reality. God is at work in history - and the believer has a part to play in that work.

Such a vision is essentially a product of an Enlightenment world view, which pictures religion as a thought system in which everything is fixed, and in which the unknowability of God has been, as the theologian Elizabeth Stuart put it, pinned down like a butterfly in a Victorian glass case. But that concept stands in contrast to the view of many of religion's greatest figures, for whom faith is an inchoate, amorphous, shifting thing.

"Everyone who observes himself doubting, observes a truth," said St Augustine, in the fifth century. So it has continued. To have faith is not to believe unflinchingly in a riveted, dogmatic creed. It is to journey, within the traditions of the past and the experience of the present, towards becoming a more whole person. It is to live with ambiguity and even ambivalence, while being committed to making a better world. As the certainties of science have imploded and our faith in progress has collapsed, so doubt has returned to the existential quest. Hence prayer should not ask God to change the world - as popular tradition supposes - but rather, in Kierkegaard's

unchanging bastion of certainty, in contrast to our culture of materialistic relativism. Religion is about being firmly grounded in absolutes. Faith is an immovable certainty.

Do not expect to read much about this in the newspapers. The insights of the early-20th-century Austrian theologian Friedrich von Hügel may explain why. All religion, he says, must contain three elements which correspond to three stages of human development. The first is an institutional element corresponding to the needs of infancy - the need for structure, for trust, for stability, for protection, for discipline.

The second element is intellectual. It corresponds to the needs of adolescence, when the critical faculty comes into play in a search for meaning; a time to impose or discover an order, a consistency, a unity, an identity that is distinctive and personal; a time when people need to systematise and theorise; a time when, as the Jesuit Fr Gerald Hughes has put it, "if the critical element is not fostered, Christians will remain infantile in their religious belief and practice, which will have little or no relation to everyday life and behaviour".

The third of von Hügel's elements is the mystical, to correspond to the needs of

adulthood; a time for reaching through the layers of inner consciousness, through more profound methods of prayer, reaching after a sense of the incommunicable, whereof we cannot speak.

Most newspaper reports on religion cannot see beyond phase one. They may be written by atheists or agnostics. Or they may be people whose hearts have taken a battering from materialism and scientific empiricism but who still feel that the Book of Common Prayer and the Authorised Version belong to them in the way that say, Shakespeare does. But that is about tradition, Englishness and cultural inheritance - not living faith. It is a Hovis-ad, sepia-tinted view of religion, a symbol in an uncertain world of a time which was different and secure. All change by the Church is, from this

standpoint, a bad thing. Moreover, the Church as an institution offers journalists (rarely the most theologically literate of individuals) yet another cast of characters to act out the splits and rows which are the essence of modern journalism. News values venerate events, novelty, conflict, power, individuals, scandal, titillation, and self-interest. Against that, gospel values - love, justice, compassion, self-sacrifice, fidelity, perseverance, community, forgiveness, solidarity, celebration, and powerlessness - can hardly compete.

More intellectual commentators are often stuck in phase two. They account themselves liberals - being tolerant, up to a point. Yet their rationality cannot fully allow the irrational, or the inconsistencies of the Bible. Yet the very tools of the Enlightenment - scepticism and historical scholarship - have made clear that the Bible is not a coherent statement of dogma but a series of documents which chart one people's changing relationship with God.

Von Hügel's contention was that the institutional, the intellectual and the emotional have to exist in balance in any religion. So they must in any civilised society. For whatever the achievements of technology, the old questions keep surfacing. In the end we die alone, in the solitude of inner silence if not in loneliness, and so we have to come to terms on our own with existential truths - about God, the possibility of an afterlife, or just about the meaning of our time on this earth.

"There is no one who has lived who has not asked himself these questions at some point," as it was rather poignantly put the other day by a man living with HIV. But the sense is not just there for those living in the shadow of death. "Over the age of 40 it is a full-time job trying to look away from the fact of mortality," the novelist Martin Amis once said.

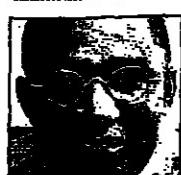
Most people prefer to look away until the issue is unavoidable. There are some who, facing up to it, embrace nihilism. But many seek the answer in religion. To this reason has no coherent answer, for faith, like poetry and love, speaks to areas of life outside reason's remit. If religion does its bad in public, it does its good in private.

'Pilgrims' Progress', by Paul Valley, appears in today's Independent Saturday Magazine



Photograph: Scottish Daily Record

Interviewers do more than ask the punters' questions



TREVOR PHILLIPS
ON JOURNOS AND ANGELS

This one is about journalists and their audiences; me and you. It is also about democracy. So let me start with an *homage* to the columnists' favourite opening sentence, as immortalised by my *Private Eye* rival, Glenda Slag. Is it just me, or are the journalists becoming bigger than their stories?

Most reporters would recoil at the suggestion. The defenders of John Humphrys, under fire this week for bullying Harriet Harman on *Today*, repeat

the standard mantra that interviewers merely ask the questions that the public would ask if they had the chance. This is fatuous. The public wants journalists, especially the premier division interrogators, to ask the questions that they themselves would never ask, either because they would not dare, or because they wouldn't think of them. If not, why not just fill the presenters' chairs at the *Today* programme, or *Newshight*, by rotation of anyone who phones in? The fact is that today's journalists are a different kettle of fish: they can be ranked in the same way as footballers, because interviewing is a rare skill. You can be born with the equipment - language, force of personality, a quick wit, but you have to train to be in the premier division with the Dimblebys, Paxman, Humphrys et al.

It is not only the political journalists who have been in the news. The tabloids have been full of pictures of the newest journalistic glamourpuss, Lauren Booth, who happens to be the Prime Minister's sister-in-law. More important, she has now become the latest addition to the

roster at the London *Evening Standard*, where she is writing on lifestyle matters. In a sense she'll step into the shoes of the late Jeffrey Bernard, chartering metropolitan comings and goings. She is too young to have a serious track record in debauchery, but anyone who can beat the patron saint of louche himself, Alan Clark, must have something going for her. She clearly has some skills required by a journalist. She recently blagged tube fare off a *Big Issue* seller; to be fair, she later compensated him handsomely, but even so she must have the best part of the world's reserves of *chutzpah*. However, close as she is to the centre of power, Miss Booth is unlikely ever to be an essential component of our democracy.

On the other hand, there are star journos who increasingly play a role in informing the citizen of the true meaning of the public rhetoric of the politicians. The danger, of course, is that the messenger may obscure or mistranslate the message; but that is why we have a range of media with different kinds of voices. Two of the most im-

portant have been in the news themselves this week, and they could not be more different.

John Humphrys was pilloried for his now trademark interruptions of Harriet Harman on the *Today* programme: Richard Littlejohn, who has now flown back to *The Sun*, is reputedly about to trouser nearly a million smackers a year for his column and TV appearances. I don't know Humphrys; I do know Littlejohn well, having introduced him to television and produced his first successful series on terrestrial TV. Both men are successful for one reason: they make waves in public life. They force debate to take place.

You may be dismayed by Humphrys' style, but you are grateful that it unsettles politicians of all kinds. You may be appalled by Littlejohn's nonsense summing up of some debates - on a proposal to raise the age at which cigarettes can be bought, he observed that it meant that you could be "buggered" at 16 yet couldn't have a fag afterwards - but his ability to test the arguments of our rulers to near destruction

would be welcome in the House of Commons.

Are the journos getting too big for their boots? Probably. But it is not their fault. The arcanes rules of our political game now mean that every politician has to line up with the party whips and avoid raising anything which might take MPs "off message". For example, Tony Gove could go very far in attacking Lord Simon over his alleged conflict of interest, or quizzing the Paymaster-General twice roughly about his offshore arrangements, for fear of laying his own troops to waste, since they too have probably followed exactly the same procedures over the past 20 or so years. No new Labour MP can safely scrutinise Ministers' actions without having the withering charge of disloyalty deployed. Thus scrutiny is left to the media. This is a sad state of affairs, both for the politicians and for the reporters.

For the politicians, the fact that most of the pressure on the Government to reveal itself is coming from the scribblers, give or take the odd blast from a Select Committee, is an em-

barrassment; what are we paying them for, if not to scrutinise the performance of the executive?

For the journalists, the public's desire for interviewers constantly to scrap with their subjects leads to an unpleasant carping tone in our business; and quarrelsome, valuable as it may be, is not analysis. In the end, the skilful politician can always defeat his interrogator by a mixture of bluster and bonhomie.

Had Richard bothered to read my column a couple of weeks back, appealing to the Christmas decoration manufacturers to stop using black angels. I imagine it would have been meat and drink to him; but thank you to all of you who sent cards with black (and nearly-black) angels. In particular, Amnesty International produced cards which satisfied even me. And for those who recognise that this is a season of something-on-other for more than one *faith*, my colleague Julia came up with a card showing Santa embracing an orthodox rabbi. Maybe this diversity thing will catch hold. Whatever you're marking this week, enjoy.

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20/OBITUARIES

Wilfred Josephs

Wilfred Josephs, composer: born Newcastle upon Tyne 26 July 1922; married 1956 Valerie Wisbey (two daughters); died London 17 November 1997.

Wilfred Josephs once commented: "Composing may be agony at times but it's what I do best and what I want to do most, and not too many people can say they spent their life that way!"

In a productive career spanning almost 50 years, Josephs was a seminal, but not easily defined figure in Britain's musical life. His compositions encompassed all forms of musical genre and style and communicated in a direct and powerful way to the appropriate audience. As a commercial composer he wrote scores for more than 120 British television productions, 30 feature films and many documentary programmes; while at the time of his death his "serious" concert music had just passed opus 180 with a sadly incomplete Second Celto Concerto.

Josephs received performances of almost all his music around the world, and was an inspiring teacher in Britain and America. Simultaneously, he almost always completed his film or concert commissions to the specified deadline. He was one of the very few freelance composers of his generation



Josephs: prolific

able to support himself and his family entirely by composing.

Born in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1927, the fourth and youngest son of Russian/South Shields Jewish parents, Josephs spent his formative years in Gosforth and as a scholar at Rutherford College Boys' School. In 1939 he was briefly evacuated to Carlisle, where his first musical experiments simplifying a difficult Chopin study on his foster-parents piano-player led to concert forays organised by his brother Cyril and tentative piano lessons. Back at Rutherford in 1940, Josephs's interest in music flourished when he was discovered "penning masterpieces" on full-score, hand-ruled staves in free periods often borrowing complex figures and motifs from Dvorak or Saint-Saëns.

He was encouraged to perform piano recitals at luncheons, but a catastrophe playing Saint-Saëns' *The Swan* led to his admission, years later, that "by amateur standards I seem to be good at it but inside it all and to fellow professionals, we all

know that I'm a pretty lousy pianist". The "agony" of performing live became manifest before film or television recordings later in life when the mere notion of conducting or vetting his music would bring about severe nausea.

In 1945, Josephs followed his two older distinguished medical brothers to Durham University's medical faculty in Newcastle, changing soon after arriving to the Dental School. At the time, although he knew he wanted to write music, he saw that it was impossible: "I suppose I wasn't assertive enough." During his college years he composed, played and wrote sketches for a variety of rag reels, culminating in formal lessons in composition with Arthur Milner, from which only one short polytonal piano piece, *Féles de Lune*, survives. In 1951 Josephs qualified, left the Dental School and served his National Service in the Royal Army Dental Corps, being posted to Germany.

Returning home following his father's sudden illness in 1953, he enrolled with Professor Alfred Nieman as a part-time composition student at the Guildhall School of Music in London. Winning a GSM Scholarship allowed him to travel to Newcastle and assist in the nursing of his increasingly sick father; from this painful experience, he responded by composing: "I wrote an entire symphony – my first – opus 9, in which I depicted his gradual disintegration and death: he died in the music before he died in real life. It was agony for me." When Josephs returned with his mother to London in October 1955, he re-enrolled at the GSM and worked as a dentist during the day at Unilever.

While continuing to work and study in the mid- to late-1950s Josephs started to receive occasional broadcasts by the BBC and performances at the Society for the Promotion for New Music. However, early in 1958, he realised that he was moving into the 12-note system and needed guidance. He was keen to compose a work that related extra-musically to Rodin's sculptures, particularly *La Porte de l'Enfer*, and thought about various mentors, including Edmund Rubbra, Frank Martin and Paul Hindemith, before finally deciding upon the Paris-based Olivier Messiaen.

Fortunately, a Leverhulme Scholarship enabled him to study in Paris for a year, accompanied by his wife. Discovering that Madame Loriod (Messiaen's pianist wife) taught composition to his pupils and not Messiaen himself, Josephs then studied with one of Schoenberg's most distinguished pupils, Max Deutsch. Nothing came of the great *Rodin-Symphonie*, but Deutsch's lessons would have a lasting impact on the young composer's later pieces.

In 1960, Josephs met the television and film director Claude Whatham, who required an epic score for his series *The Boer War*; from this first

– Matthew J. Eve

BIRTHS, MARRIAGES & DEATHS

DEATHS

HARDMAN: Andrew, "Bugsy", 10, many friends died 14 December. Funeral, 11am, Tuesday 22 December, Highgate Cemetery, No flowers please. Donations to charity / Samaritans.

Announcements for Gazette BIRTHS, MARRIAGES & DEATHS (Births, Adoptions, Marriages, Deaths, Memorial services, Wedding anniversaries, In Memoriam) should be sent in writing to the Gazette Editor, The Independent, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E1 4SD, telephoned to 071-292 2012 (24-hour answering machine 071-293 2011) or faxed to 071-293 2010, and are charged at £6.50 a line (VAT extra). OTHER Gazette announcements (notices, funerals, forthcoming marriages, Marriages) must be submitted in writing (or faxed) and are charged at £10 a line, VAT extra. They should be accompanied by a daytime telephone number. The Independent's main switchboard number is 071-293 2000.

ROYAL ENGAGEMENTS

The Duchess of Kent, President, Macmillan Cancer Relief, attends the Eton College Carol Concert, Eton, Berkshire.

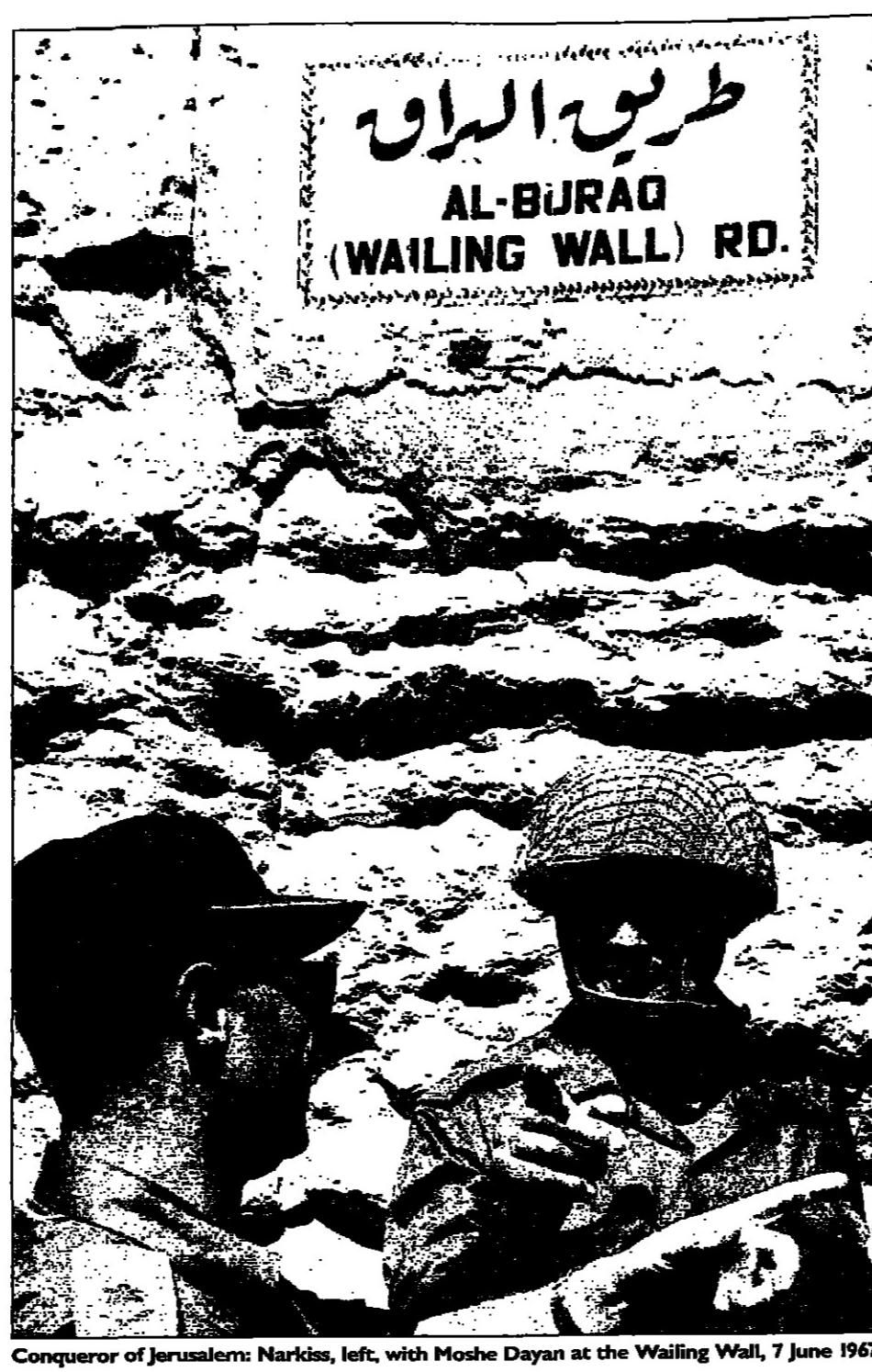
Changing of the Guard TODAY: The Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment mounts the Queen's Life Guards at Horse Guards, 11am. TOMORROW: The Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment mounts the Queen's Life Guards at Horse Guards, 10am. The Band of The Royal Regiment of Wales mounts the Queen's Guard, at Buckingham Palace, 11.30am, band provided by the Irish Guards.

Birthdays
TODAY: Miss Jenny Agutter, actress, 45; Mr Michael Beaufront, Seigneur of Sark, 70; Lord Brabazon of Tara, former government minister, 51; Mr Billy Bragg, rock singer-songwriter, 39; Mr Simon Channing, former Chairman, London Philharmonic, 37; Sir George Coldestream QC, former Permanent Secretary to the Lord Chancellor, 90; Mr Malcolm Cooper, marksman, 50; Mr Peter Criss, drummer, 55; Mr Charles Denton, former Head of Drama, BBC Television, 60; Miss Bo Derek, actress, 40; Mr Bob Diddley, singer and guitarist, 69; Lord Howes of Aberavon OC, former cabinet minister, 71; Mr Simon Hughes, actress, 51; Mr James Leasor, writer, 74; Sir Gavin Lightman, High Court judge, 58; Mr Donald Randy, actor, 79; Miss Rachel Trickett, former Principal, St Hugh's College, Oxford, 74; Mr John Whitney, former chairman, the Really Useful Group, 67; Mr John Wilkins, Editor, the *Tablet*, 61. TOMORROW: Mr Alexander Bennett, former chairman, Whitbread and Co, 84; Air Commandant Dame Jean Bromet, former Director of the WRAF, 85; Mr Basil Collins, former chairman, Nabisco, 74; Mrs Chris Evert-Lloyd, tennis player, 43; Miss Jane Fonda, actress, 60; Sir James Hill, former MP, 71; Mr Peter Johnson, Headmaster, Wycliffe College, 50; Sir Frederick London, former Appeal Court judge, 86; Mr Albert Lee, rock guitarist, 54; Mr Geoff Lewis, horse-racing trainer, 62; Mr Wyndham Milligan, former Principal, Wolsey Hall, Oxford, 90; Sir John Nabarro, consultant physician, 82; Mr Steve Perryman, footballer, 46; Mr Anthony Powell, novelist, 92; Mr John Quayle, actor, 59; Sir John Quinton, former chairman, Barclays Bank, 68; Fit Lt William Reid VC, 76; Brigadier Vera Rookes, former director, Army Nursing Services, 73; Mr Walter

Spanghero, rugby player, 54; Mr Greville Starkey, former jockey, 58; Mr Michael Tilson Thomas, conductor, 53; Mr Peter Timiswood, playwright, 61; Mr Doug Walters, cricketer, 52; Dr Alan Wynne Williams MP, 52; Mr Carl Wilson, rock guitarist, 51; Professor Robert Worcester, chairman, Market & Opinion Research International, 64.

Anniversaries
TODAY: Births: Sir Robert Gordon Menzies, statesman, 1894; Deaths: John Ernst Steinbeck, novelist, 1968; Arthur Rubinstein, pianist, 1982; Bill Brandt, photographer, 1983. On this day: the first General Assembly of the Church of Scotland was held, 1560. Today is the Feast Day of St Ammon and his Companions, Sts Philip and Silos, St Philogonius and St Ursicinus; today is also the first day of Ramadan. TOMORROW: Births: Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1118; Jean Racine, playwright, 1639; Benjamin Disraeli, first Earl of Beaconsfield, statesman, 1804; José Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili (Joseph Stalin), Soviet leader, 1879. Deaths: Giovanni Boccaccio, author, 1375; François Scott Key Fitzgerald, novelist, 1940; Sir Jack John Berry Hobbs, cricketer, 1963. On this day: the first flight of man around the moon took place in Apollo 8, 1969. Tomorrow is the Feast Day of St Anastasius II of Antioch, St Glycerius, St John Vincent, St Peter Canisius and Saints Thesmocles and Dioscorus.

Deaths
TODAY: Victoria and Albert Museum: Louise Hoffmann, "Representations of the Virgin in Silver", 2.30pm. National Portrait Gallery: John Cooper, "NPG Christmas Quiz", 12pm, 3pm.



Conqueror of Jerusalem: Narkiss, left, with Moshe Dayan at the Wailing Wall, 7 June 1967

Brig-Gen Uzi Narkiss

Uzi Narkiss, soldier and administrator: born Jerusalem 6 January 1925; head, operations division, General Headquarters, Sinai Campaign 1956; military attaché, France 1959-62; Commander, National Defence College 1963-65; Commanding General, Central Command 1965-68; staff, Jewish Agency 1968-88; married Esther Hacohen (one son, two daughters); died Jerusalem 17 December 1997.

A celebrated photograph of the 1967 Six Day War shows General Uzi Narkiss marching triumphantly in the newly captured Old City of Jerusalem with the Minister of Defence, Moshe Dayan, and the Chief of Staff, Yitzhak Rabin. Narkiss proudly described himself as the "general of the troops that liberated Jerusalem".

Yet there is a double irony to his claim. It is doubtful that either Dayan or Rabin would have chosen Narkiss to command the Jerusalem front had the general staff foreseen King Hussein's involvement with Abd al-Nasser in the war. Even after the clashes with the Egyptians, Israel's prime minister, Levi Eshkol, pleaded with the

king not to open fire. It was hoped that the central front would remain quiet while the Israeli dealt with the Egyptians and, later, the Syrians. Narkiss, a seasoned and sensible soldier, was rewarmed by being sent for further study in Paris.

As battalion commander in the 1948 War of Independence, Narkiss attempted to come to the relief of the besieged Jewish Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem. He broke through Zion Gate but was ordered to pull out. He also commanded the Etzion bloc of Jewish settlements near Jerusalem, for three months, before they fell to the Jordanians.

So his triumph on 7 June 1967 in Jerusalem had for him both personal and national significance. Earlier that morning he received Motta Gur's famous radio transmission: "The Temple Mount is in our hands." He immediately went to the Temple Mount to share the moment with the paratroopers who captured it. "There was never such a thing as this for the one who stands here now," Narkiss said. "There are no words on my lips. We all pay tribute to history."

In his last years he devoted himself to maintaining the soldiers' memorial on Ammunition Hill in Jerusalem, where many of his comrades, as well as many brave Jordanians, fell.

– Joseph Finkes

Christopher Skinner

Christopher John Skinner, astrophysicist: born Loddon, Norfolk 26 June 1963; died King's Lynn, Norfolk 21 October 1997.

Following his education in King's Lynn, he undertook a degree in Astronomy and Physics at University College London, graduating in 1984, and remained there to undertake a PhD research project with the infrared astronomy group.

This involved the building of CGS3, an infrared spectrometer tuned to wavelengths longer than those to which the eye is sensitive, which was successfully commissioned on the UK Infra-red Telescope on Mauna Kea, Hawaii. There Skinner established his instrument-building skills, but at the same time independently embarked on his own initiative on a separate project to analyse and numerically model the radiation emitted by dust particles present in the material ejected by red giant stars of the type that our Sun will one day become. He revealed himself to be a talented theoretician and numerical analyst.

Following a PhD in Astrophysics in 1987 and a post-doctoral appointment at UCL, Skinner won an SERC Personal Research Fellowship, which he elected to hold at Manchester University's Jodrell Bank Radio Observatory in 1990 and 1991. There he embarked on an energetic programme that made use of Merlin, the Multi-Element Radio Linked Interferometer, to study the structure at very small angular scales of the ionised gas ejected by massive stars.

He made an enduring contribution to our understanding of the dust-particle discs which have been found around stars similar to our own Sun and which may be a sign of planet-building in action; as well as to the study of the molecules and dust particles ejected by red giant stars – stars which are responsible for the synthesis of the particulate solids which are subsequently incorporated into and form planets such as the Earth.

A paper on the Egg Nebula in the constellation of Cygnus, of which he was the principal author and which appeared in the 1 December issue of the journal *Astronomy and Astrophysics*, is representative of his strengths and creative abilities, gathering a wide range of new observational data to which he applied sophisticated numerical modelling of the radiation flow in the nebula, and gained physical insight, to achieve an elegant new synthesis for understanding the complex characteristics of the system.

Chris Skinner was born in 1963 in Loddon, Norfolk. Fol-



Skinner: instrument-building

Chris Skinner authored 63 scientific publications in less than 10 years, of which 41 were in refereed journals. Further papers are in press. He always seemed to view life with amusement and certainly lived it to the full. Over the years he sent his friends and colleagues many detailed and often hilarious e-mails, which must have amounted to millions of words. He also played a key role in encouraging the research of several younger colleagues by acting as a mentor at crucial stages in their careers.

– M. J. Barlow

FAITH & REASON

The Archbishop and the Odalisque

Christians are often suspicious of the secular Xmas. But the tradition of puritan asceticism serves them ill, argues The Rev John Kennedy.

Two intriguing Christmas notes chimed together last week. I found that Safeway is selling chocolate body paint. And the Archbishop of Canterbury is to broadcast to the nation from an Asda supermarket. Together they raise awkward questions about incarnation and carnality.

The Safeway stuff comes in a handy 500g jar. The label carries a tasteful copy of Ingres' voluptuous *Odalisque* – a really shrewd marketing ploy. Most of us would feel shy if coated in corporeal confectionery. But the message here is that you can share this delight even if you are built for comfort rather than speed. And of course the greater the surface area of the customer, the larger the volume of product sold. There are liturgical possibilities too, but of a pagan rather than a mainstream Christian sort – though the brush supplied looks a bit prickly, so it may produce some sensations of self-mortification. What is fascinating is that it is now established in the commercial main-

stream: this is Safeway's own brand chocolate body paint.

Which brings us to the Archbishop. His pre-recorded message will figure in a service of lessons and carols at the Asda store in Gravesend tomorrow. The service will be transmitted live by satellite to the company's stores nationwide, on what the company calls "Asda FM". This is part of a growing trend, which the Archbishop first spotted and is now making his own. He stands in the great tradition of Wesley, who took a robust celebration of the faith into an increasingly paganised Britain. Dr Carey is right to celebrate the Nativity of Christ like this. He is acknowledging that the Word is made flesh, earthly, embodied.

The project has its dangers. Safeway might respond with a chocolate body paint demo tape, beamed live by satellite to all their stores – Asda FM v Cox's TV. When I rang the company, they asked me to make clear to readers that they have no plans to "position their product against the Archbishop". I'm happy to do that. And anyway, the point is not to pose some moral contrast between these commercial competitors, the Archbishop and the Odalisque, nor to protest against rampant, spreading commercialism.

The point is to suggest how un-

comfortably the Christian tradition lies in our extraordinary times. It is the age of unprecedented experimentation in relationships between men and women: there is an unabashedly Pagan element to this kind of adventure in human living, made visible – if risible – on our supermarket shelves. But this experimentation results in increased family break-up and has begun to affect public policy. Thus the bounty hunters of the Child Support Agency run amok among us, and the Government has set up its workhouse regime for single parents, to cries of outrage, from its own supporters. The flesh has shrugged off the Word, and is unprotected even by normal pagan prudence.

The present age has also exposed the vulnerability of the Christian notion of incarnation, now that society no longer imposes the sanctions of poverty and ostracism on those who take part in this experimentation. Our view of incarnation is inadequately carnal. Charles Wesley spoke wonderfully of "our God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man". Yet it would help more if we understood Him as usefully made human. The early Christian Fathers held that God could redeem human nature only if he took it on completely. We now know that human nature to be richer, stranger, more complex than we imagined. That knowl-

edge helps us to recognise in Jesus one who is aware of those complexities, and who deserved his fiercest judgement for those who had a simple, narrow view of that humanity.

In contrast, the asceticism of the Christian tradition makes it difficult to explain ourselves to our hedonistic society – of which the Christian community is part. Only the most exclusive Christian sects are exempt from the consequences of these experiments in intimacy. It is not simply a matter of pagan and Puritan living in mutual bafflement – often the two exist in the same person.

Society may possibly again become more conservative in its management of intimacy. But we are unlikely to revert to a serenity in intimate life that the Christian tradition can again find comfortable. Some day that tradition must come to terms with the fleshly reality lived by the faithful. The alternatives seem to be deepening hypocrisy or sectarian obscurity. The Archbishop can hardly share these thoughts with the good folk of Asda, and it may not yet be time for the Wise Men to offer gold, frankincense, myrrh – and chocolate body paint. But the implications of incarnation cannot be shirked for ever.

• *Faith & Reason* is edited by Paul Valley

Footsie on
MARKET REPORT
Greece
EUROPEAN
ECONOMY

21/SHARES

Footsie on the slide as another bout of Asian flu strikes

MARKET REPORT



DEREK PAIN

Another bout of Asian flu hit shares. With Tokyo and Hong Kong lower and a left wing president installed in South Korea, the stock market was soon in a ragged retreat and lost further ground when New York compounded the uneaseable gloom.

By the close Footsie was nursing a 148.1 points fall at 5,020.2. It was the biggest closing slide for two months. At one time the index was down 182.6 points, below 5,000.

Tokyo was the early unsettling influence. It fell 5.2 per cent, lowest since the heady days of the 1980s. Hong Kong then took fright and with New York decided under the weather there was absolutely no chance London could ignore such despair.

Just to confuse the issue the market also experienced its

monthly witching hour when futures and options expire. On occasions it has been an eventful tug-of-war between the bears and the bulls. Yesterday it was all rather quiet but nevertheless in the fragile environment, it added to tension.

Most of the carnage occurred among blue chips. For once, supporting shares managed to stay out of the firing line. Indeed the FTSE Small-Cap index turned in a relatively stable performance, falling 6.5 points to 2,951.

Blue chips' soggy display was achieved in fairly active trading: sellers were evident although order-driven trading may have exaggerated some falls towards the close.

Energy Group, reflecting Margaret Beckett's clearance of the £5.9bn US takeover bid, was one of only nine blue chips

to make headway - a modest 10p to 665p.

A few just-about-detectable ripples of excitement went through utilities with Scottish Power up 7p to 526p and Anglian Water 15p higher at 835p. But Southern Electricity, the one regional electricity company to retain its independence, failed to light up on bid hopes: the shares fell 2p to 492p.

Indeed Thames Water was one of Footsie's major casualties, sinking 85p to 831p. Exporters were hard hit with TI, the engineer, crashing 56.5p to 439.5p and RMC, on its last day as a Footsie constituent, down 91p to 827p.

Financials also suffered with National Westminster Bank dropping 65p to 1,010p.

Société Générale's takeover of Hambros banking operations left the shares down 2.5p to 256.5p.

Even on such a grey day progress was made. Racal Electronics put on 8p at 257p and Danks Business Systems continued its modest recovery after collapsing on a profits warning: up 6p to 239p.

The Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the holiday industry held no worries for Airports, the nation's second largest package tour

operator, which rose 17.5p to 1,220p. First Choice, in third spot, climbed 2p to 99p.

Photo-Me International, the coin-operated photo booths chain, jumped 31p to 142.5p after enjoying a rare event - a profits uplift. The company increased its year's forecast from £114m to £14.5m.

Manders, an ink maker, soared 93.5p to 245p as US group Flint Ink moved in with an agreed 250p offer.

And Transac, the engineer linked to under-pressure Paymaster General Geoffrey Robinson, added 10p to 77.5p as two directors acquired 40,000 shares at 70p and 77p.

On Thursday the shares dipped to their lowest for three years.

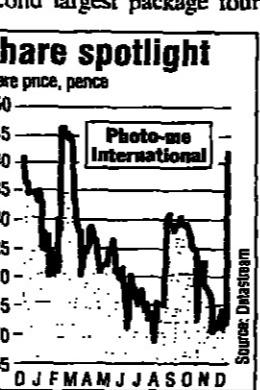
American Port Services produced a profit warning, falling 24p to 124.5p and

Peterhead, a crane group, gave up 6p to 31.5p after saying earnings per share "will be substantially below market forecasts".

Pizza Express, the fast food chain, held at 779p. Chief executive David Page has replaced entrepreneur Luke Johnson as chairman. Mr Johnson, who remains a director, is masterminding the launch of the Belgo mussels and chips restaurants on the market through Lonsdale Holdings (suspended) at 47.5p. He sold 150,000 Pizza shares. Hugh Osmund, another Pizza director, unloaded 105,000 shares.

Hercules Property Services is riding at a 275p high. There is talk of a reverse takeover with Whitney Mackay Lewis, a firm of architects, the target. The shares are 28p against 45p three years ago.

Robert H Lowe, the packaging and sportswear group, bounces along near its year's low at 22p. Year's figures next month should top £4m against £2.4m. The group is likely to reap rich rewards from the World Cup.



52 week	High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Td	P/E Code
Alcoholic Beverages							
521 401 Alfa Romeo	521.00	-1.00	4.2	820	000		
521 402 Balfour (U)	790.00	-1.00	4.2	812	000		
521 403 Bell & Caw	224.00	-1.00	4.2	812	000		
521 404 Basso	57.00	-0.50	4.2	812	000		
521 405 Black & Decker	1,000.00	-1.00	4.2	812	000		
521 406 Blundell	1,000.00	-1.00	4.2	812	000		
521 407 Bodycare	1,000.00	-1.00	4.2	812	000		
521 408 Brundage (H)	1,000.00	-1.00	4.2	812	000		
521 409 Caltex (UK)	1,000.00	-1.00	4.2	812	000		
521 410 Carling (T)	1,000.00	-1.00	4.2	812	000		
521 411 Chivas Regal	1,000.00	-1.00	4.2	812	000		
521 412 Diageo	1,000.00	-1.00	4.2	812	000		
521 413 Fisons	1,000.00	-1.00	4.2	812	000		
521 414 Heublein	1,000.00	-1.00	4.2	812	000		
521 415 Heublein	1,000.00	-1.00	4.2	812	000		
521 416 Heublein	1,000.00	-1.00	4.2	812	000		
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521 470 Heublein	1,000.00	-1.00	4.2				



Fifty years ago: The Hambros dealing room in Bishopsgate, London in 1938. The sale brings the end of the independent UK investment bank a step closer

End of an epoch as Hambros sells banking arm to SocGen for £300m

The prospect of extinction for the independent UK investment bank came a step closer yesterday with the sale of Hambros Bank, founded in London in 1839, to Société Générale of France. Lea Paterson charts the changing faces of the City of London's finance houses.

Hambros yesterday admitted it had failed to revive the flagging fortunes of its 158-year-old investment bank as it revealed plans to sell its banking group to Société Générale (SocGen), the French bank for £300m in cash. The deal will lead to yet another round of redundancies in the City.

"We sadly came to the conclusion that we were not making any significant return to our shareholders," said Sir Chips Keswick, Hambros' chairman. Hambros announced in October it had retained Schroders, a rival bank, to help it conduct a strategic review, following a series of disappointing profit figures and fierce criticism of its involvement in the CWS scandal.

Aficionados of UK City institutions will draw at least some comfort from SocGen's decision to retain the famous Hambros name. SocGen is to rename its UK investment

banking division SG Hambros, following the tradition set by the numerous foreign banks that have swallowed up British financial institutions over the years.

Hambros yesterday had the dubious honour of becoming the third British banking name to fall into foreign hands in the last two months. Last month, National Westminster Bank (NatWest) sold chunks of NatWest Markets, its investment banking arm, to Bankers Trust, the US bank, and Deutsche Morgan Grenfell, the investment banking arm of Deutsche Bank, the German banking giant. Also last month, Barclays sold parts of BZW, its investment banking arm, to Credit Suisse First Boston, the Swiss-American bank.

The deal will spark off yet another round of City redundancies after recent news that



Break-up: Sir Chips Keswick, Hambros' chairman (left), and the bank's Danish founder Carl Joachim Hambro

FTSE slides as South Korea sparks fresh market turmoil

A big Japanese bankruptcy and a fresh post-election dive in South Korea's currency provided some share price plummets in London and New York. As if that were not enough, a star Wall Street analyst turned bearish and Nike issued a profit warning.

Diane Coyle in London and Stephen Vines in Hong Kong report on a fresh attack of 'Asian flu'.

Within minutes of the start of trading the Dow Jones index had lost more than 50 points, and by late morning in New York it was 169 points lower at 7,677.57.

The fact that yesterday marked the quarterly "triple witching", when stock options, index futures and options on these futures expire together, had taken the index down 270

points at one stage.

It did not help that Nike issued a warning that its second-quarter earnings had fallen 20 per cent because of slower demand in both Asia and the US. On top of that, Ralph Acampora, a star analyst at Prudential Securities and formerly one of Wall Street's biggest bulls, predicted "troubled waters" for the market next year. He said most shares could fall 20 per cent or more next year.

Shares in London had already been sharply lower all day, and the instant dive in New York cemented it. The FTSE-100 index ended 148 points down at 5020.1, having shed as much as 183 points earlier. Other European markets were also down.

The UK gloom was embellished by a survey showing the fourth successive monthly decline in consumer confidence. The GfK survey is a reliable indicator of future retail sales, and confirmed other signs of gradual economic slowdown.

The round-the-globe tumbles started in Korea and Japan. Supporters of Kim Dae-jung

were out on the streets celebrating his victory but share prices tumbled 5 per cent as the Korean won lost 6.6 per cent of its value against the US dollar. Mr Kim, a long-standing opposition politician, has an image as an anti-business figure.

In Japan, the Nikkei-225 index plunged by 847 points, a fall of more than 5 per cent. The index closed at 15,314.89, its lowest for a year, having touched 15,170 earlier in the day.

This was mainly due to fallout from Thursday's collapse of the foodstuffs trader Toshoku, the fourth-biggest bankruptky in post-war Japan. Toshoku was pushed over the brink by banks refusing to extend further credit in the face of its \$4.16bn debt.

This indication of a tougher approach to over-extended borrowers by the banks sparked fears of further bankruptcies. Most other Asian markets also slumped. The biggest fall came in Hong Kong where share prices fell more than 3 per cent.

Television regulators yesterday granted the licence for British Digital Broadcasting (BDB), the pay-TV joint venture owned by Carlton and Granada which plans to start broadcasting next year, with only minimal changes.

The conditions, imposed after six months of discussions between BDB, the Independent Television Commission (ITC) and the European Commission (EC), restrict the length of the programme supply agreements to five years – and prevent BDB directors from also sitting on the board of BSkyB, its main competitor.

BSkyB was originally a member of the BDB consortium, but was forced to pull out by the ITC before the licence was awarded. However, BSkyB will still supply BDB with programmes. The original contract between BDB and BSkyB was for seven years. As a result of the conditions imposed by the ITC, it will be reduced to five.

The ITC subsequently dismissed unconfirmed reports that the EC had yet to approve the deal. An ITC spokeswoman – Peter Thal Larsen

said the body had received a letter from the EC which said it accepted the conditions and stated they were compatible with Community law.

The EC decided to look into the licence when NTL, which lost out to BDB in the bidding process, complained that BDB's agreement to show programmes supplied by BSkyB was anti-competitive.

The conditions also effectively force Gerry Robinson, Granada's chairman, to stand down from BDB's board. Mr Robinson is also chairman of BSkyB. Granada said yesterday that Henry Staunton, finance director, would sit on BDB's board instead of Mr Robinson.

Analysts said that the conditions were no surprise. "This is just the Commission wanting to put its fingerprints on the deal," said Mathew Horsman, media analyst at the stockbrokers Henderson Crosthwaite, pointing out that the agreement between BSkyB and BDB would still be renewable when the five years were up.

– Peter Thal Larsen

– Nigel Cope

source: Bloomberg

23/BUSINESS



MICHAEL HARRISON
ON MMC
INQUIRIES
AND THE
BREAK-UP
OF HAMBROS

Counting the hidden costs of competition

When Labour was in opposition, it was very much taken with the idea of making hostile bidders pick up the costs of the defence in cases where the bid failed. Not an unreasonable suggestion you might think. Fending off hostile bids is an exhausting and expensive business. Not only is there the cost in terms of management time, but investment banks, brokers, lawyers, accountants and financial PR advisers do not come cheap once the meter starts ticking. It cost Northern Electric £12m to beat off Trafalgar House and Lasmo £20m to thwart Enterprise Oil, for instance.

Now that Labour is in government, why not turn the tables and insist that government pick up the costs of the bidders when the Monopolies and Mergers Commission waves a takeover through? After all, the Prime Minister never tires of telling us that Labour is the party of business.

This week the MMC has approved both the takeover of ScotRail and Central Trains by the coach operator National Express and the merger between PacifiCorp of the US and Energy Group, owners of Eastern Electricity. But only after long and costly investigation.

In cases where the MMC decides a merger may not be expected to operate against the public interest, there is nothing the Secretary of State, in this case Margaret Beckett, can do. Her hands are tied. However, the MMC's verdict in these latest two cases does raise questions as to

whether either bid need have been referred in the first place.

In the case of ScotRail, the Director-general of Fair Trading, John Bridgeman, advised against a referral on condition that National Express was made to dispose of its competing Scottish bus service. After six months examining the merger, the MMC came to an identical conclusion.

As for PacifiCorp group, both Mr Bridgeman and the electricity regulator Professor Stephen Littlechild advised against a referral. Mrs Beckett decided, however, that one was necessary, citing her concern that the present regulatory framework might not be able to cope with the merged company.

The MMC has taken a different view. It has concluded that the regulatory safeguards proposed by Professor Littlechild last August are entirely adequate and that no other conditions or undertakings need be attached.

The upshot is that PacifiCorp and Energy Group have wasted four months arguing their case before the MMC when the Government itself conceded that the deal raised no competition concerns - the main basis for referring bids.

In the case of National Express the waste of time and money is even more apparent because the remedy recommended by the MMC is the one that was available to Mrs Beckett right from the beginning.

The cost to the MMC of the two in-

quiries will have been about £600,000. This will be borne by Mrs Beckett's department since the MMC's funding comes out of its budget.

But everyone else is left to pick up their own costs. For Energy Group these are reckoned to come to about £5m. PacifiCorp has probably spent the same - flying teams of executives over from Oregon on the US West Coast and putting them up in the Savoy does not come cheap.

These costs may not seem large when set against the size of the deals. The PacifiCorp bid valued Energy Group at £3.7bn. Nevertheless, it is the kind of money that shareholders tend to get very irritable about when they discover it has been frittered away on a pointless exercise.

Mrs Beckett would argue that just because the MMC finds no threat to the public interest in a bid does not mean that it should never have been referred in the first place.

That may be true. But the DTI struggled yesterday to pick many crumbs of comfort from the MMC report on Energy Group. The best that can be said is that it has cleared the air and provided some input into the wider review of utility regulation currently being undertaken by the DTI.

It may also provide a model for the way other regional electricity companies are regulated henceforth. PacifiCorp is not the first US utility to bag a British

REC - seven others are already under American ownership. In all cases, the bids were heavily debt-financed but not as heavily so as the one from PacifiCorp which would have ended up with \$12bn of debt, some of it in the form of junk bonds. It was, as the report makes clear, the sheer scale of this debt funding and the fear that it would have to raid Eastern Europe for dividends to service the debt - that concerned the MMC most.

So it would not be surprising to see the kind of licence conditions imposed on PacifiCorp being extended to other foreign-owned RECs.

Whether the report gives Ed Wallis of PowerGen the green light to go ahead and buy an electricity supply company is harder to say. Energy Group is both a big supplier and generator of electricity. But the issue at stake here was ownership, not whether vertical integration is desirable.

Another day, another British merchant bank disappears into foreign ownership. The trend that began when Phillips & Drew was sold to Union Bank of Switzerland in 1985 has turned into a rout.

The sale yesterday of Hambros' investment banking business to Société Générale of France virtually completes Britain's exit from a business in which it once led the world. Morgan Grenfell, Barings, SG Warburg, Kleinwort Benson,

Smith New Court. They have all gone. And now what investment banks do we have left of any size? Only Schroders, which ironically enough played handmaiden in delivering Hambros to the French, Rothschilds, Lazard, and, at a pinch, Close Brothers.

Does it matter that we have given up the ghost and conceded that only American, Swiss, German and French banks have the kind of balance sheets and stomachs to underwrite an investment banking business? Perhaps not. Perhaps Barclays and NatWest are better off leaving their Continental rivals to put up with the abysmal returns that merchant banking seems to deliver these days.

Perhaps what matters is that the business is still conducted in the Square Mile, albeit with a foreign brass plate on the door. After all, we no longer have many British-owned car companies or electronics firms to speak of but that does not appear to have harmed either industry.

We may not mourn the passing of Hambros after 158 years. It neither had the partnerships that give Lazard its strength nor the fund management business that underpins Schroders. So it had probably already had its chips even before it got into bed with Andrew Regan and his ill-fated Co-op bid. But it must make Sir Evelyn Rothschild wonder sometimes whether there is a future in running an independent investment bank.

Holiday firms escape travel agency sell-off

Britain's main package holiday companies were given an early Christmas present yesterday when the year-long competition inquiry into the travel industry asked for only minor changes. Although the government claimed its measures would mean lower prices for consumers, Nigel Cope, City Correspondent, finds that the real winners are likely to be the big tour operators.

Supporting the findings of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, Margaret Beckett, President of the Board of Trade, said the foreign package holiday market was "broadly competitive" but that certain practices in the travel trade operated against the public interest.

She proposed measures to stop these practices but stopped short of the most drastic measure which would have been to force companies like Airtours and Thomson to sell their travel agency chains.

Shares in the big tour operators such as Airtours and First Choice rose sharply on the news as the stock market breathed a sigh of relief over the leniency of the report.

The first change proposed by the MMC yesterday will mean tour operators will no longer be able to make some holiday discounts conditional on consumers buying specific travel insurance. Margaret Beckett said this misled consumers about the level of discount they were receiving. It said travel agents were able to inflate the level of discount because of the large margins made on insurance sales.

The report also called for greater transparency in the ownership links between tour operators and travel agents. The proposed changes mean

that Airtours, which owns the Going Places chain and Thomson which owns Lunn Poly, will have to display their names on their travel agency businesses and on their brochures.

The final change demanded is the end to the "most favoured customer clauses". These are agreements between a tour operator and a travel agent to offer a discount on tour operators' holidays as it offers on any other company's deals.

The travel industry welcomed the report's findings. But Peter Long, managing director of First Choice Holidays, said the unravelling of the tie between insurance policies and discounted holidays could lead to higher prices. As First Choice does not own a travel agency chain, he was pleased with the decision to force tour operators to declare their ownership links. "All we ever wanted to see is a level playing field."

Airtours, Britain's second largest tour operator said the changes "would not materially affect" the financial performance of its business. Harry Coe, group managing director said: "There have now been a number of investigations by the UK competition authorities into the leisure travel industry. This latest ... examination is final confirmation that the market is working effectively."

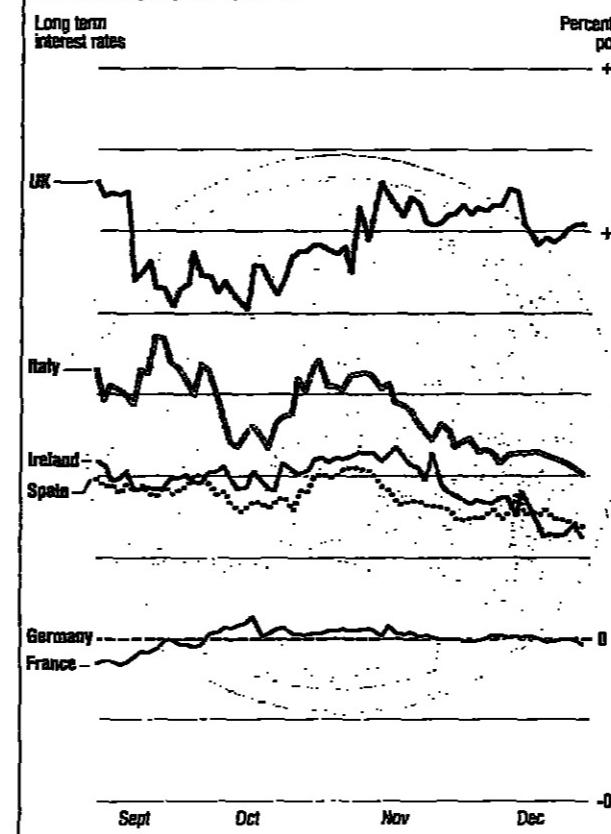
Travel shares bucked a declining market on the report's findings. Airtours shares rose 17.5p to 1220p. First Choice rose 2p to 99p.

How the travel giants stack up					
Tour operator	share %	sales £m*	travel agency	share %	airline
Thomson	15.9	1718	Going Places	16	Airtours
Airtours	15.9	1718	Going Places	16	Airtours
First Choice	10.1	1052	Flight	16	Air 2000
Thomas Cook	4.2	873	Thomas Cook	12	Airworld
Total	41.3	4643	Total	50	Sabena

*1996 figures. Source: MMC report using subdivisions from companies and published accounts
*Former is that of the parent group of the tour operator and travel agents.
**Caterus, parent company of Inspiration, has a majority stake in Inspiration

Who will be in EMU? The financial markets' view

The closer other countries get to the dashed baseline (Germany) the more likely they are to join EMU.



TOWARDS EMU: If the line moves towards the German base line it means investors no longer require such a high premium for holding that country's bonds compared to German ones, because they are confident the currency won't devalue against the mark. In other words, they think that country will be locked into a single currency with Germany in 10 years' time.

AWAY FROM EMU: However, if they think the country won't be in EMU, that it will have higher inflation, and that there is a risk of a future devaluation against the mark, then they will demand an extra premium for holding that country's bonds, so the line will move away from the base.

When will EMU start? The City Analysts' View

The Independent asked analysts from:

Nikko Europe, Paine Webber, ABN Amro, JP Morgan, Deutsche Morgan

Salomon Brothers, Goldman Sachs, HSBC James Capel, UBS

what probability they placed on EMU starting on time.

Probability EMU starts on time: 84% (84% last week)
Probability EMU is delayed: 13% (13% last week)
Probability EMU never happens: 3% (3% last week)

Asian turmoil overshadows EMU debate

The turmoil in the Asian markets last week and the elections in South Korea overshadowed the debate over European economic and monetary union (EMU). "There has not been anything this week to make change. Asia has been by far the biggest story," said Gunter Tumlin of Salomon Brothers.

According to Alison Cottrell of Paine Webber, it is increasingly unlikely that any of the main governments in Europe will pull a big surprise between now and May next year when the Council of Ministers approves the list of countries taking part in EMU in 1999.

"As we move towards the end of the phase, the pressure on the heads of state not cause a shock is greater, in terms of both their future standing and also in terms of the reaction," she said. It would be much harder for any of the countries which the markets expect to join up to pull out without a huge negative impact on their currency.

Julian Jessop of Nikko Europe said that as most people assumed EMU would go ahead on time, the issue was where the interest rate would be set by the European Central Bank.

The European Union is nearing a possible compromise on who will be the future ECB president. EU monetary officials said yesterday.

Officials said there appeared to be greater optimism that differences between France and the Netherlands, the two main protagonists, can be resolved.

Green electricity levy to be reduced

The levy on electricity bills to fund "green" power projects will drop to 0.9 per cent from April, the industry regulator said yesterday. Professor Stephen Littlechild said the reduction, from the current 2.2 per cent, resulted from existing commitments to end subsidies to the nuclear industry. In 1996-97 the levy, which was put in place at electricity privatisation, raised £844m, though the rate fell last April from 3.7 per cent to 2.2 per cent.

Rolls-Royce sells boiler unit

Rolls-Royce has sold International Combustion, the Derby-based subsidiary that makes steam-powered products such as boilers, to Asea Brown Boveri for an undisclosed amount. The sale completes the aerospace giant's exit from the steam-power generation industry. In July, it sold its larger Newcastle-based Parsons Power Generation unit to Germany's Siemens AG for £30m. Rolls-Royce said the Derby unit, worth about £27.8m, represented less than 2 per cent of its net assets.

John Lewis sales muted

Retail group John Lewis added its voice to the chorus of retailers pointing to a disappointing Christmas for the high street, saying its sales fell short of its "fairly ambitious expectations". Department store sales just in the week to December 13 rose 3.9 per cent from a year earlier, while sales in its Waitrose supermarkets were up 5.7 per cent. Total group sales for the week were up 4.8 per cent.

Emap among IPC bidders

Anglo-Dutch publishing group Reed Elsevier yesterday said that 10 or more suitors had emerged for its IPC magazine arm, as media company Emap confirmed that it was among the bidders.

COMPANY RESULTS

	Turnover £	Pre-tax £	EPS	Dividend
B&B Design (I)	0.434m (0.618m)	0.041m (0.027m)	0.59p (0.33p)	- (·)
Chessex Total (P)	2.14m (1.77m)	0.340m (0.155m)	0.75p (0.40p)	0.20p (0.15p)
Consolidated Total (I)	2.58m (2.67m)	0.003m (-0.652m) nill (2.2p)	- (·)	- (·)
Cottingham (I)	5.41m (5.04m)	-0.074m (-1.38m) -0.8p (-22.5p)	- (·)	- (·)
Kyogensoft Software (I)	0.062m (-)	0.077m (-0.052m)	1.2p (1.1p)	- (·)
Mecano (I)	24.02m (22.10m)	2.110m (4.751m)	4.05p (0.08p)	2.0p (2.0p)
New London Capital (I)	- (·)	0.582m (2.06m)	0.75p (2.525p)	1.0p (1.0p)
Reit and Helms (I)	9.88m (8.63m)	0.565m (1.071m)	-2.55p (5.57p)	1.7p (1.7p)
(I) - Final (I) - Interim 1 EPS is pre-exceptional				Dividend to be paid as a PDI

HURRY Limited availability!

Fujitsu is the world's second largest IT company, with a turnover in excess of \$36bn, and operating on a global basis. The company has been operating for over 50 years, during which time it has become a market leader in desktop and mobile computing as well as in the areas of computer memory, display devices and software. This enviable position has resulted from its continued investment in R & D, (currently running at 10% of revenues) which has ensured the consistent production of reliable, leading edge products designed to meet the needs of the end user.

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 - Windows 95 + Works V4.0
- £645 inc. VAT**

All products come with one year on-site warranty and free telephone hotline support

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Sat 9.35pm Sun

25/PERSONAL FINANCE

Stocking fillers that won't give the taxman a Christmas bonus



The present that grows: Some saving accounts for children pay more than 7 per cent
Photograph: MSI

For most children, Christmas means lots of presents, preferably toys and other treats. If – admittedly a big if – there is any cash left over, you can also build up capital toward the costs of your children's education or a first mortgage deposit. But, Iain Morse warns, try to avoid any unnecessary tax liabilities.

Surprising as it may seem at first sight, tax allowances on income and capital gains are the same for under-18s as for adults, with a couple of important exceptions. Children are not eligible for PEPs and TESSAs. They can, however, use the basic personal allowance of £3,765 before paying income tax, and the standard capital gains allowance of £6,500.

That applies to interest and income from deposit accounts and investments unless these result from capital given by one or both parents. In that case, only the first £100 of income can be taken tax free, with the remainder taxed at the parents' highest marginal rate. You can avoid some or all the £100

limit on income from parental gifts by choosing low-yield investments which show capital growth.

Moreover, income from capital given by grandparents or other relatives is not subject to that surcharge. Ask them to contribute, although giving them the money to pay into your child's account in order to avoid tax is strictly illegal.

If you do want to give money to your children and are in danger of breaching the £100 limit (there is still a gap in tax law allowing avoidance of paying tax at the parents' highest rate).

That turns on putting capital into a "bare trust", where the trustee does not pay income to the child, or into a bank account in the child's name. Income arising is then treated as the child's own and subject to its allowances.

Another option is to invest into a roll-up fund, which does not generate taxable income. If partly or wholly cashed in after a child's 18th birthday, income and capital gains will be taxed as belonging to the child. That could be useful for those entering higher education and without much earned income.

So much for taxation. Most banks and building societies offer gross interest rates on children's savings accounts

below 5 per cent. But the savings habit is one many parents want to encourage. You will need to give £1,500 or more to breach the £100 limit on tax-free income.

One of the best deals comes from Nationwide's offering, the SmartSave instant access account, which pays 7.2 per cent annually on balances over £1. On balances over £500, Britannia comes top, paying 7.25 per cent on their First Saver Account. Many children's account offer incentives, free gifts, vouchers and the like. Sadly, none gives Teletubbies. You will just have to queue.

National Savings also offer five-year Children's Bonus bonds, the current issue paying a fixed rate of 6.75 per cent on balances between £25 and £1,000. Income is tax-free, and exempt from the £100 limit. But early encashment is penalised.

Unit and investment trusts offer the prospects of long-term growth, and can be held on behalf of a child by a parent or trustee. Invesco markets a Rupert Fund, compete with soft toy or mug for new investors. Some 70 per cent of the fund is held in Footsie 100 shares. But performance has been poor; 71 per cent growth over five years against an 103 per cent average on UK equity growth funds.

UK equity growth and general funds are the most likely best buys, combining good

Bryan Johnstone, of the stockbrokers Bell Lawrie White, suggests that parents should look at "split level" investment trusts. These are funds, running between five to 10 years, where the income element from a share is split from the growth element.

Examples include Aberforth's Split Income trust, currently trading at a 21 per cent discount to the net value of its underlying assets. Mr Johnstone likes them because "they are passive investments, which can utilise a child's annual capital gains tax allowance even if the purchase capital comes from a parent".

Minimum investment limits on lump sum payments into unit or investment trusts may deter many smaller savers. But monthly savings plans provide a flexible alternative. Foreign & Colonial will accept premiums of just £25 per month and, once a plan starts, allow lump sum top-ups of just £100.

Fund selection should balance risk and return against the likely timescale of investment. Remember, you hold these trusts on your child's behalf, and have effective control over when they are cashed until the child's 18th birthday.

UK equity growth and general funds are the most likely best buys, combining good

10-year returns with low volatility by comparison to international and emerging market funds.

But there are long-term alternatives which can serve your child a number of purposes in adult life. Friendly societies offer baby bonds; low premium saving plans with tax-free status. These run for between 10 and 25 years. Again, many offer poor returns.

Tunbridge Wells Equitable is an honourable exception, with growth on its with-profits fund averaging 11 per cent per year.

Better still, why not consider a full cost, whole-of-life policy from an insurer like Standard Life, the mutual insurer. The company will accept children aged from three months and a monthly premium of £20. Over 50 years, in return for premiums invested of £12,000, a policy of this type could have a surrender value of £72,000.

This long-term approach has distinct advantages. Firstly, premiums are not inflation-linked but fixed at the outset. Maintaining the policy should not be difficult. Secondly, it can be used to back a mortgage, or be put in trust by your child for the benefit of your grandchildren. Finally, if you go with a mutual, and it converts to PLC status, windfalls may result.

INTERNET INVESTOR ROBIN AMLÖT

The London Stock Exchange has not really known how to deal with information technology (IT) stocks. In the past it has lumped some in its support services category, along with employment agencies and cleaners, while others have sat alongside makers of washing machines and irons.

Now, at last, FTSE International, which manages the London share indices, is creating a separate sector for IT stocks, although it may not be until the end of 1998 that a new sub-index covering the sector will be regularly quoted.

Shares in the five biggest London-listed IT companies rose after the decision to launch the sector was made public. Whether they will continue higher is a moot point.

Most IT companies already have very high price/earnings ratios. The likes of Logica, Semco, Misys and Sage all have p/e ratios higher than the market average, in some cases more than double the p/e for the market as a whole of between 17 and 18.

However, optimists can point to the fact that the European software and services market has been growing at an annual rate of around 20 per

cent for most of the 1990s. Companies contained in the new IT sector show average share-price gains of 87 per cent in the past three years, compared with a rise of 57 per cent in the FTSE 100 index.

One reason London has woken up to the need for a separate sector for IT stocks is the steady march of UK companies across the Atlantic, seeking listings on the US Nasdaq market. Nasdaq is the market of choice for US bi-tech and IT companies.

US investors are more attuned to such investments. Many are looking for the next Microsoft and are more receptive to new IT stocks.

This difference in attitude carries over into websites.

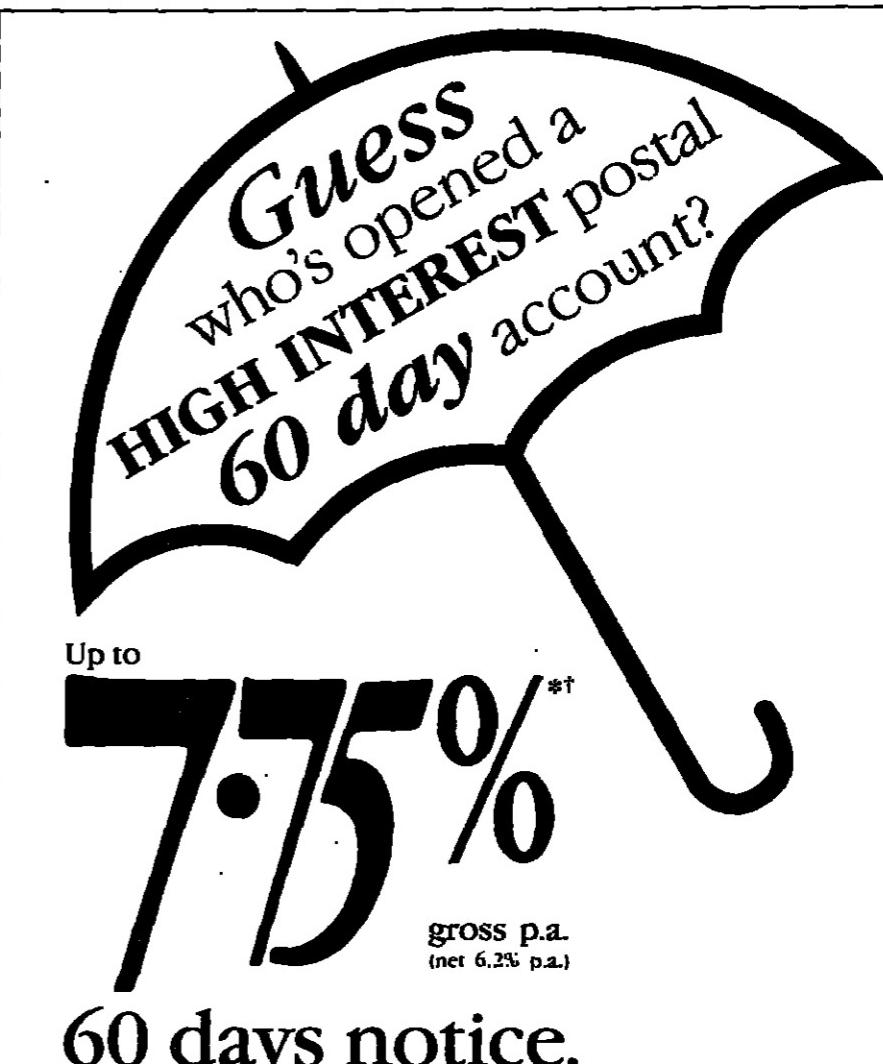
The London Stock Exchange's site offers only a basic guide to how the market works and has no current or even historical price data,

although there are links to the FTSE, Liffe and Crest websites. By contrast, the Nasdaq site begins with a welcome page offering information on the best way of viewing the site depending on which version of browser software, and even which computer system, you are using.

However, if you are unwilling to take a chance on the real markets, why not try your hand at two new on-line stock market games: Global Best Six and Global Trader, from Global Stock Games?

The games are based on the daily developments in a selection of companies from 12 international stock markets. The accountants Ernst & Young monitor and audit the game results and payouts, and market information comes from Dow Jones and Reuters. Each game will cost you about £2.95 (\$5) to play and the entrance money provides the revenue for prizes.

London Stock Exchange:
www.londonstockex.co.uk
FTSE International:
www.ftse.com
Nasdaq: www.nasdaq.com
Global Stock Games:
www.stockgames.com



*Rate applicable for deposits of £10,000 or more.

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Nationwide Bonus 60	5.25% 5.9% 6.3%
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Bloomberg

27/PERSONAL FINANCE

مكتبة المجلات

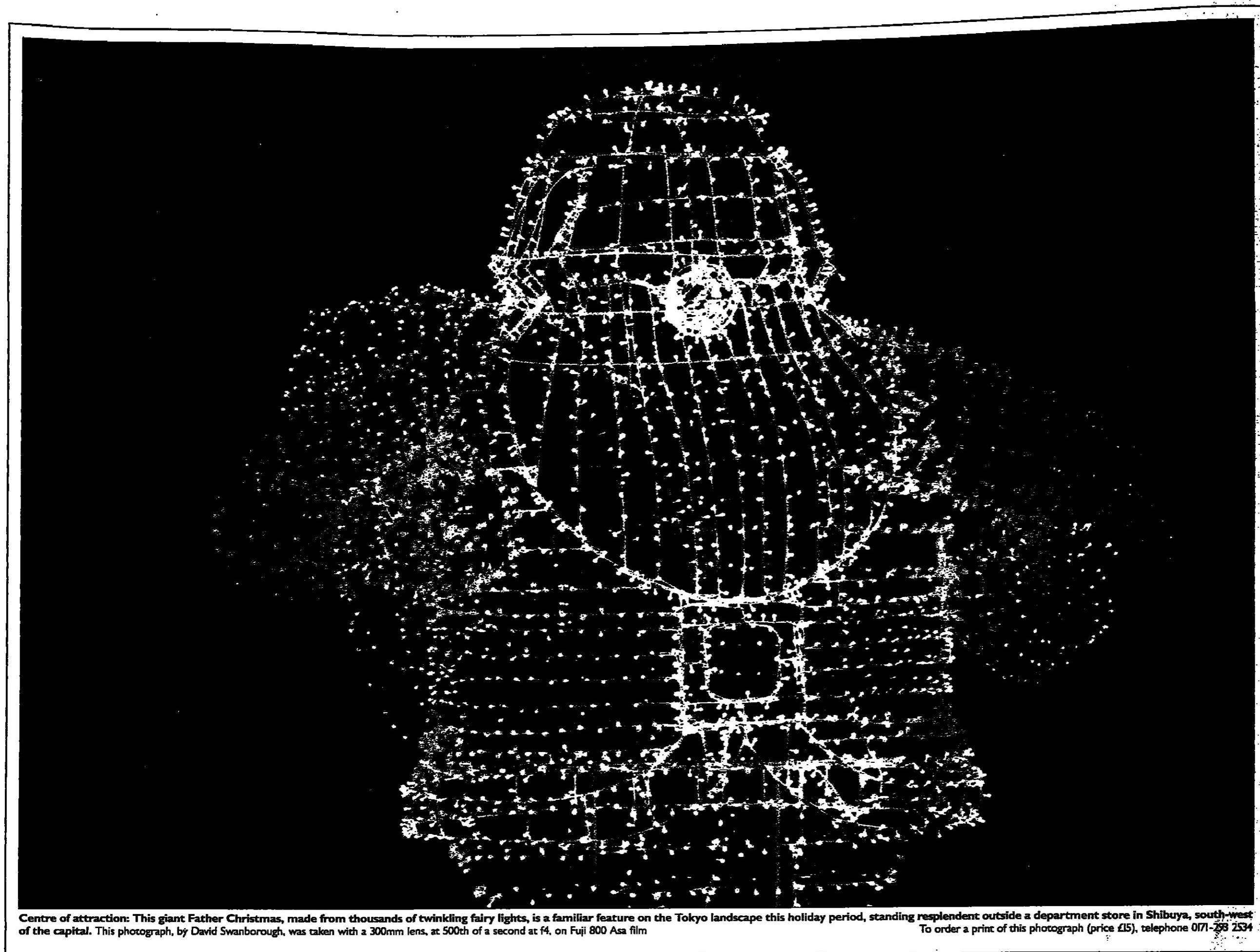
BEST BORROWING RATES

	Telephone	% Rate and period	Max. rate %	Fee	Inclusive
MORTGAGES					
FIXED RATE					
Scallopene BS	0800 192180	1.92% to 2.12%	2.75%		
Northern Rock	0800 551500	3.05% to 3.20%	7.5%		
Bray & White	0800 119505	3.05% to 3.14%	7.5%		
VARIABLE DISCOUNTED RATES					
Galloway BS	0800 193140	3.05% to 3.14%	7.5%		
Fenwick's	0800 000000	3.05% for 3 years	5%		
Graves & Wright BS	0800 192180	3.05% to 3.14%	7.5%		
FIRST TIME BUYERS FIXED RATES					
Woolwich BS	0800 192180	3.05% to 3.20%	7.5%		
Leeds & Halifax BS	0800 222777	3.25% to 3.20%	7.5%		
RENDERSONS BS	0800 192180	3.05% to 3.14%	7.5%		
FIRST TIME BUYERS VARIABLE DISCOUNTED RATES					
Leeds & Halifax BS	0800 193140	3.05% to 3.14%	7.5%		
First Mortgage	0800 050000	4.75% for 2 years	8%		
RENDERSONS BS	0800 193140	3.05% to 3.14%	7.5%		
UNSECURED PERSONAL LOANS					
	Telephone	APR %	Max LTV	Fixed monthly payments (£50 over 3 yrs)	
				With Insurance	Without Insurance
Object Line	0800 000000	12.95%	12.95%	£100.00	£100.00
Capital One Direct	0800 212252	12.95%	12.95%	£100.00	£100.00
ARMER & LEWIS	0800 000000	12.95%	12.95%	£100.00	£100.00
SECURED (SECOND CHARGE)					
			Max LTV Adv.	Term	
Cheshire Bank	0800 192180	10.5%	100%	£100.00	£100.00
Royal Bank of Scotland	0800 121121	10.5%	12.5% to 13.0%	£100.00	£100.00
First Direct	0800 192180	11.5%	12.5% to 13.0%	£100.00	£100.00
OVERDRAFTS					
	Telephone	Account	Authorised	Unauthorised	
			5% p.a.	5% p.a.	
Object Line	0800 000000	ALL ACCOUNTS	12.95%	12.95%	
Bank of Scotland	0800 040404	Direct Debit	11.0%	26.5%	
CREDIT CARDS					
	Telephone	Card Type	Min. Income	Rate	APR %
			£500	5%	5%
				Fee	Interest free period
STANDARD					
Co-operative Bank	0800 050000	Advantage Visa	0.84%	10.5%	7.50% to 10%
Co-operative Bank	0800 050000	Advantage Visa	0.84%	10.5%	0 days
GOLD CARDS					
Co-operative Bank	0800 050000	Advantage Gold	0.84%	10.5%	7.50% to 10%
Co-operative Bank	0800 050000	Advantage Gold	0.84%	10.5%	0 days
STORE CARDS					
	Telephone	Payment by direct debit	Payment by other methods		
		% PM	APR	% PM	APR
Object Line	0800 000000	12.95%	12.95%	12.95%	12.95%
Object Line	0800 000000	12.95%	12.95%	12.95%	12.95%
A - Minimum age 21 yrs. Holders of comprehensive motor insurance policy or lender's existing customers APR - Annualised percentage rate ASU - Accident, sickness and unemployment insurance B+C - Buildings and contents insurance H - Higher rate applies if insurance not arranged I - Insurance to be arranged MP - Mortgage indemnity premium N - Introductory rate for a limited period U - Unemployment insurance					
All rates subject to change without notice. Source: MONEYFACTS 01622 500677 18 Dec 1987					

BEST SAVINGS RATES

Telephone	Account	Notice or term	Deposit	Rate %	Interest interval
INSTANT ACCESS					
Barclays Bank	0800 045085	Instant Access	£100	6.75%	Day
Barclays Bank	0800 222200	Cash Savers	£50	7.00%	Year
Barclays Bank	0800 119500	Second Access	£10,000	5.50%	Year
Leeds & Halifax	0800 222777	Personal Access	£5,000	5.50%	Year
INSTANT ACCESS POSTAL ACCOUNTS					
Barclays Bank (UK)	0800 045085	Instant Access	£100	6.75%	Day
Barclays Bank (UK)	0800 145187	Postal Saver	£100	7.25%	Year
Barclays Bank	0800 119500	Postal Access	£10,000	5.50%	Year
Barclays Bank	0800 060000	Post Cash Isa	£10,000	7.50%	Year
NOTICE ACCOUNTS & BONDS					
Barclays Bank (UK)	0800 222212	Postfix 90	30 Days	£10,000	7.00% to Year
Leeds & Halifax	0800 119500	60 Direct	60 Days	£2,500	7.50% to Year
Barclays Bank	0800 222200	60 Direct	60 Days	£2,000	7.50% to Year
Barclays Bank (UK)	0171 203 1550	Basic Plus	1 Year	£2,001	8.00% Monthly
CHEQUE ACCOUNTS					
Barclays Bank	0800 747477	HCA	Interest	£2,500	6.45% Monthly
Barclays Bank (UK)	0171 203 1550	HCA 5000	Interest	£5,000	6.45% Monthly
Barclays Bank	01422 333355	Asset Reserve	Interest	£10,000	5.50% Quarterly
Barclays BS	0800 429429	Classic Postie	Interest	£10,000	5.50% Yearly
FIXED RATE BONDS					
Barclays Bank (UK)	0800 222212	Fix for Six	6 months	£5,000	7.00% Monthly
Granite Bank	0171 667 1510	Flexi Rate Bond	1 Year	£20,000	8.00% Monthly
Barclays Bank	01422 333355	Flexi Option Bond 4	582.98	7.00%	7.00% Monthly
Barclays BS	0800 429429	Flexi Option Bond 3	282.99	£10,000	7.00% Monthly
FIRST TESSAS					
Barclays Bank (UK)	01938 744605	Tessas	5 Weeks	£10,000	7.00% Year
Barclays Bank (UK)	0171 203 1550	Premier saver 6 months	5 Years	£10,000	7.00% Year
Barclays Bank	01422 333355	Postfix 125	5 Years	£10,000	7.00% Year
Barclays BS	0800 747477	Postfix 125	5 Years	£10,000	7.00% Year
FOLLOW ON TESSAS					
Barclays Bank (UK)	0177 203 1550	Tessas	5 Years	£10,000	7.00% Year
Staffordshire BS	01922 317485	Tessas	5 Years	£10,000	7.00% Year
Granite Bank	0171 667 1510	Tessas	5 Years	£10,000	7.00% Year
Barclays BS	0800 747477	Tessas	5 Years	£10,000	7.00% Year
GUARANTEED INCOME BONDS (net)					
Barclays Bank	0800 040404	1 Year	£10,000	6.51%	Year
Barclays Bank	0800 040404	2 Year	£10,000	6.60%	Year
Barclays Bank	0800 040404	3 Year	£10,000	6.65%	Year
Barclays Bank	0800 040404	4 Year	£10,000	6.65%	Year
Barclays Bank	0800 040404	5 Year	£10,000	6.65%	Year
OFFSHORE ACCOUNTS (gross)					
Cheshire Building Soc	01483 700090	Instant	£10,000	7.00%	Year
Cheshire Building Soc	01483 700090	Instant Offshore	£25,000	7.25%	Year
Northumbrian BS	01463 718121	60 Day	£10,000	7.00%	Year
Northumbrian BS	01463 718121	60 Day	£10,000	7.00%	Year
Northumbrian BS	01463 718121	60 Day	£10,000	8.00%	Year
NATIONAL SAVINGS ACCOUNTS (GROSS)					
Investment Accounts	01483 700090	1 Month	£20	4.75%	Year
Investment Accounts	01483 700090	3 Months	£20	5.25%	Year
Investment Accounts	01483 700090	6 Months	£20	5.50%	Year
Investment Accounts	01483 700090	12 Months	£20	5.75%	Year
Investment Accounts	01483 700090	12 Months	£20,000	6.00%	Year
Income Bonds	01483 700090	3 Month	£2,000	7.00%	Month
Income Bonds	01483 700090	6 Month	£2,000	7.25%	Month
Capital Bonds Series J	01483 700090	5 Year	£100	6.65% F. Monthly	
Capital Bonds Series J	01483 700090	12 Month	£1,000	7.25% F. Yearly	
Capital Bonds Series J	01483 700090	12 Month	£1,000	7.00% F. Month	
Children's Bond Issue H (var. rate)	01483 700090	5 Year	£25		

28/ THE BIG PICTURE



Centre of attraction: This giant Father Christmas, made from thousands of twinkling fairy lights, is a familiar feature on the Tokyo landscape this holiday period, standing resplendent outside a department store in Shibuya, south-west of the capital. This photograph, by David Swanborough, was taken with a 300mm lens, at 500th of a second at f4, on Fuji 800 Asa film

To order a print of this photograph (price £15), telephone 0171-288 2534

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Oh...pink fluffy
slippers!
How novel.
And with a
little piggy
motif too.
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This Christmas, get to Santa before he gets to you. Ask for the new Siemens S10, which has just been voted the Best Business Mobile in the World by Connect magazine and which comes with 10 hours talktime, the world's first colour display and a voice memo function.

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